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ABSTRACT

This report examines the stepfamily phenomenon and how stepfamilies are treated. After the introductory first chapter the second chapter provides a clear definition of what constitutes a "stepfamily" and explores some of the demographics regarding stepfamilies. Next the report examines the major issues with which stepfamilies deal. How these issues distinguish them, though there are similarities, from "normal" nuclear, intact, biologic families is discussed. The third chapter examines the structural differences between stepfamilies and intact families. These issues include the biological parent living elsewhere, boundary issues, complex extended family structures, and stepfamily happiness. The fourth chapter explores the stepfamily issues which deal with emotional, or affective areas. The fifth chapter examines parenting in stepfamilies, including parenting arrangements, adolescence, custodial versus non-custodial parents, and guidelines for effective stepparenting. Finally the sixth chapter presents recommendations and suggestions to enable middle school counselors, or other professionals who work with stepfamilies, to provide the best educational information, most appropriate emotional support, and most useful guidance, to best meet the needs of the stepparents, the stepchildren, and the school personnel who interact with them.
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STEPFAMILIES WITH ADOLESCENTS: AN INTERVENTION MATRIX MODEL FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS

by

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REPORT

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

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STEPFAMILIES WITH ADOLESCENTS: AN INTERVENTION MATRIX MODEL FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS

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DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to Thomas W. Grimshaw, my best friend and my most ardent and constant source of support. His patience, encouragement, understanding and love, coupled with his technical skills, his hours of computer time, and his clear and rational guidance, helped bring this report to fruition.

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I would like to especially thank Dr. Richard Mowsesian for teaching me how to "narrow it down to the sliver" when I had difficulty finding a clear focus for this report. His belief in me, patience, encouragement and humor have empowered me to believe in, be patient with, encourage and humor myself.

I want to also thank my three sons, Christopher, Patrick and Joshua; it was their being members of a stepfamily which first sparked my interest in the subject.

July 15, 1991
Austin, Texas

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Stepfamilies are a rapidly growing phenomenon in the United States today. No longer are they unusual forms of family configurations. In spite of the growing divorce rate, Americans appear to prefer being married, since an average of 80% of those who divorce eventually remarry (Preister, 1986). Approximately two-thirds of those who remarry already have children. Currently, it is estimated that 20% of the children under 18 are stepchildren, and that "by the year 2000, this form of family will outnumber all other kinds of American families" (Glick, 1989, p. 26). It is projected that one out of two persons living today will, sometime during his life, be a member of a stepfamily (Furstenberg, 1980).

Because of this mushrooming population of adults and children who are members of stepfamilies, all the social institutions, the professions, and society, in general, need to take a closer look at this "different" kind of family, the stepfamily. A clear definition of what constitutes a stepfamily, what the exact magnitude of this new family structure is, what its special needs and tasks are, how this phenomenon came about and may be impacting the rest of society, are just some of the areas which may need to be further researched.

What is emerging from the impressions of clinicians, and is being supported empirically by research, is that the stepfamily is very much an unique form. It is not simply a "new" version of the "old" family, if for no other reason, than the fact that the new stepfamily is a merging of people who originally came from two, or more, different nuclear families, as well as their birth families. This is quite unlike people who marry for the first time, as they generally have only experienced their families of origin. McGoldrick and Carter (1988) state, " So complex is the process whereby the remarried family system stabilizes and regains its forward developmental thrust that we have come to think of this process as adding a whole additional phase to the family life cycle for those involved" (p. 265). In a stepfamily, both adults and children often bring with them very different, and very ingrained (and often very unconscious), ideas and expectations of how it should and will be in the new family. McGoldrick & Carter (1988) further state, "Having the patience to tolerate the ambiguity of the situation and allowing each other the space and time for feelings about past relationships is crucial to the process of forming a remarried family" (p. 266). As this newly-formed group begins to settle down into a domestic routine, these differences, as they begin to surface, may cause serious problems.

One of the main problems, which gives rise to many others, is the idea that this "new" family "should be" like the "old" family, or, at least, like the "Brady Bunch," a television series which was popular in the 1970s. In the above T.V. show, which depicted a stepfamily of nine members, Dad, Mom, three boys of his, three girls of hers, and the housekeeper, everyone got along very well with everyone else, smiled a lot, and resolved any problems in thirty minutes or less. This was especially amazing, since four of the six children were teenagers. Most nuclear, biologic, intact families with six children, four of whom are teenagers, would have a difficult time matching the Bradys. Even if this "television stepfamily" image were to be consciously dismissed, many Americans may unconsciously absorb the idea of "one big happy family," from this and many other similar television families. Thus, possibly, the myth may be created that "all stepfamilies should be like that." Having expectations of this nature might place nearly impossible demands, and great stress, upon a new stepfamily made up of real human beings (Visher & Visher, 1979, p. 54).

Stepfamily members are not the only ones who sometimes operate under such false assumptions. Extended family members, friends, school personnel, clergy, physicians and mental health professionals, often measure the "health" of a stepfamily by unrealistic standards. The most common measure used to judge the "success," the "strength," or the "health" of a stepfamily is the nuclear, biologic, intact family (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988). Stepfamilies are neither nuclear, nor biologic, and are certainly not intact. "Nuclear" is generally used to denote a family unit that is self-contained, that is, the marital couple marry and give birth to, or adopt, children. They raise them largely by themselves, and live together with their children throughout the predictable life cycle of the family. "Biologic" refers to the fact that all the children are the natural offspring of both parents. "Intact" indicates that the family unit has not been "broken" or "disrupted" by any major event, such as, death or divorce. All the original members are still there.

By contrast, in a stepfamily, one or both of the adults has had children by a previous marriage, or close union. Often, the parenting of the children is shared by one, or more, other households between which the children move back-and-forth. Of course, the very fact that it is a "step" family precludes its being "biologic." Divorce, and sometimes death, has preceded the formation of most stepfamilies today. In the Bible men were instructed to "put new wine into fresh skins," [or else] "the skins burst, the wine runs out and the skins are lost" (Matthew 9:17). Measuring a stepfamily by intact family standards is somewhat like trying to "put new wine into old wineskins." Society must find new guidelines with which to measure healthy stepfamily functioning.

Couple the mistaken idea that a stepfamily is nothing more than the recreation of a "normal" family with the conflicting needs of a "new" family forming and an adolescent emerging from an "old" family. This situation alone is fraught with potential for discord. Complicate that with the lack of attention paid to the issues of early adolescence (Lipsitz, 1980), and the result might be a middle school child who finds himself in a new, or not-so-new, stepfamily and who may be experiencing a great deal of difficulty adjusting to any or all of these major changes in his life.

This budding adolescent has already experienced a number of unexpected, and generally unwelcome, changes in his young life. He has endured the divorce of his natural parents, or the death of one of them, followed by a period of time in a single-parent family. Possibly, he has had to move, change schools, and make new friends. Furthermore, there may have been a change in his financial circumstances, usually a decrease in family income, and he may have had to take on more responsibility at home. These external changes, all of which are largely out of his control, may have caused him much pain, anger, fear, and loneliness. These are powerful emotions which can undo and debilitate the experienced adult; they can even more seriously affect a young adolescent whose coping skills perhaps may be more limited. Unfortunately, the adults in his life are often too overwhelmed by their own problems to be of much help to him during this period of time (Bohannan, 1985).

Under ordinary circumstances, in a well-functioning, intact family with many resources, the middle school child has major transitions to make. Notwithstanding the changes brought about by the adults in his life, the average adolescent in the 11-to-14-year-old range (middle school age) is experiencing a plethora of normal personal changes. His body is changing rapidly, his mind is reaching new levels of abstract thinking and his emotions are running amuck on a roller coaster. In addition to the inner processes, the whole world of the peer group, its appeal and pressure, opens up. He must learn to move out into and join the group, be accepted by at least some minimal portion of it, and yet not succumb to the possibly destructive pressure of total group conformity.

If he manages to cope with the dissolution of his parents' marriage and all the possible related, subsequent, disruptions in his life, and, at the same time, he adequately navigates into the unchartered waters of "Middle School, U.S.A.," both academically and socially, all is very well indeed. However, if one, or both, of his parents should start dating and decide to remarry, or cohabit, his whole world may be shaken again.

For some early adolescents, this third event could prove to be too much to handle. It may mean moving again, changing schools again, and having to make new friends again. It usually involves an additional person, or persons, being introduced into his living space, perhaps in a manner somewhat "too close for comfort." Further changes in the family financial situation and the young person's responsibilities at home may also ensue. Although these last two changes may often be for the better, i.e., more money and less responsibility, they can nevertheless be stressful simply because they are changes. Sometimes, a child may begin to "act out" or have "symptoms" in reaction to the most recent turn of events. In extreme cases, some children get themselves expelled from school, get in trouble with the law, run away from home, become promiscuous, consume alcohol or other chemicals, attempt and/or commit suicide. None of these choices is desirable; all could have disastrous results, among which are: jail, disease, pregnancy, chemical dependency or death. In less severe reactions, children may develop a whole range of psychosomatic ailments, emotionally withdraw from the family, become depressed or "act out," to a lesser degree than described above, at home or at school, allow their grades to drop, or possibly even fail a grade.

Even if the child "handles it well" in the eyes of the adults involved, he may have more than the normal share of "friendship" problems with peers, be more "stressed out" by schoolwork, or have more minor "accidents" and "illnesses." This would necessitate more trips to the school nurse, school counselor, assistant principal, or other helping professionals (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988, Vishers, 1984). Furthermore, in many cases, the natural parents may, once again, be emotionally or physically unavailable to the young person. This time the parents may be caught up in the romance of starting a new relationship or a new marriage and may not be aware of or be unable to respond to the needs of the troubled youngster (Bohannan, 1985).

Because of the circumstances briefly outlined above, the young adolescent may often be very much "out of step" with his new stepfamily. Well-intentioned stepparents may be angry and frustrated by their apparent "failure" with this child. Confusion, conflict and chaos might ensue. Very often, the school counselor, which, in the case of a young adolescent, would be a middle school counselor, is contacted for help. Sometimes, the family can identify the problem, but has no idea how to proceed to solve it. At other times, family members are very much in denial about the possible causes of the adolescent's behavior and the family's distress.

The middle school counselor needs good information in order to most effectively help a stepfamily in crisis. She may employ various avenues of intervention, among which are: individual or group counseling with stepchildren at school, meeting with stepparents after school, assisting teachers caught "in the middle," teaching a parenting class to a roomful of parents, half of whom may be involved in a stepfamily situation, leading a nighttime stepfamily support group, cooperating with professionals or agencies outside the school setting, or whatever other means seem necessary and appropriate.

The middle school counselor needs to understand the unique issues of stepfamilies, specifically how they differ from intact families. Certainly, she should understand the characteristics of "normal" (healthy) family functioning. She needs to know the special needs and tasks of adolescence, focusing especially on the young adolescent. She needs to know how "normal" (healthy) families promote successful adolescent development, and how this process might be impeded during the normal course of stepfamily formation and integration.

Questions

The foregoing discussion gives rise to certain questions regarding the manner in which professionals, institutions, and the public at large (Carter &

McGoldrick, 1988), deal with stepfamilies, especially those families who have young adolescent children.

What is the nature of the stepfamily phenomenon? How many adults and children are involved? How did it all come about? Are stepfamilies treated like "normal" families, their special characteristics and differences unacknowledged or unknown? What are the characteristics of "normal," intact families, and what are the major issues which differentiate stepfamilies from "normal," intact families? What are the special needs and tasks of early adolescence? How might they be manifested and promoted in "normal," intact families? How might they clash with the needs and tasks of newly-forming stepfamilies? How might a middle school counselor best intervene to serve the needs of stepchildren, stepparents, and school staff members to whom she is responsible?

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to examine the issues which these questions raise, to present the information and the answers needed for these questions, and to clearly define for general use among middle school counselors some specific suggestions and recommendations for successful interventions with stepfamilies. This might include ways to handle feelings of stepfamily members, factual information to inform the professional and enable her to educate others, ideas for programs and support groups which could be offered, books and other reference materials which might be available. Other professionals who work with stepfamilies, specifically those families who have middle school age adolescent children (ages 11-14), may also find these suggestions and recommendations helpful.

Organization of the Report

Chapter II of this report will provide a clear definition of what constitutes a "stepfamily," and explore some of the demographics regarding stepfamilies.

Next, this report will examine the major issues with which stepfamilies deal. How these issues distinguish them, though there are similarities, from "normal" nuclear, intact, biologic families will be discussed. These issues have been divided into three categories; one chapter will be devoted to each category. Chapter III of this report will examine the structural differences between stepfamilies and intact families. In Chapter IV, the stepfamily issues which deal with emotional, or affective, areas will be explored. Chapter V, which deals with parenting in the stepfamily, will round out the special issues section.

Finally, Chapter VI will be devoted to recommendations and suggestions to enable middle school counselors, or other professionals who work with stepfamilies, to provide the best educational information, most appropriate emotional support, and most useful guidance, to best meet the needs of the stepparents, the stepchildren, and the school personnel who interact with them.

Note: In order to compare stepfamilies to families, in general, to point out their differences, their special needs and tasks, it was necessary to come up with a way of referring to those "families, in general." For the purposes of this report, the phrase " 'normal,' intact family" will be used throughout. It refers to nuclear, biologic, intact families which society regards as "normal." Since "normal" can have several meanings, the one used in this report is the societal notion of "normal" meaning "average" and "healthy" (Walsh, 1982, p. 4)

CHAPTER II. DEFINITION and DEMOGRAPHICS

Definition

In order to clearly discuss stepfamilies, a definition of the term is necessary. According to Glick (1989), stepfamilies are defined in the following way:

> Family: A group of two or more related persons who maintain a household
>
> Remarried Family: A husband and wife maintaining a household with, or without, children in the home in which one or both of the spouses is in a second or subsequent marriage
>
> Stepfamily: A remarried family with a child under 18 who is the biological child of one of the parents and who was born before the remarriage occurred (p. 24).

A stepfamily is one that includes a child (or children) who is not biologically related to at least one of the parents. There are many different versions (Visher & Visher, 1988):

> Stepfather Family: natural mother, her children and stepfather
>
> Stepmother Family: natural father, his children and stepmother
>
> Complex Stepfamily: mother and father who are natural parents to their children from former marriages and stepparents to their spouse's children (pp. 20-21).

There are many varieties and special situations. Except where specifically stated, for the purposes of this report, all families in the above categories, including those who are not legally married, but function as such, and those whose children do not usually reside with them, but visit regularly, will be considered stepfamilies.

Demographics

Marriage

In early colonial New England, "life was characterized by the realities of a subsistence economy, an initial shortage of women, and a value orientation that honored matrimony and the family," (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987, p. 4). The importance of marriage was related to the very basic need for survival, both as a family and as a colony. Three hundred years later, marriage is still important and popular, but there have been some shifts in the reasons why.

In recent times, since the end of World War II, there has been a decline in first marriages, and an increase in the average age at first marriage. Preister (1986) states that the average age for men marrying for the first time rose from 23.7 to 24.6 during the period from 1940 to 1980. For women, during the same time period, the average age rose from 20.5 to 22.1. The average ages of people who are marrying, in general, are estimated to be 25-44,. Some of the reasons given for the delay in marrying are (Glick, 1980):

- difficulties in finding employment in times of economic recession,
- increases in the number of years spent in college,
- increases in informal "living together" arrangements,
- decreases in social pressure to marry and have children immediately.

In spite of the delays, Americans are considered the "most marrying people in the world" (Preister, 1986). He states that "94% of women and 96% of men will marry sometime during their lifetimes" (p. 9). According to Furstenberg (1986), in America "people marry for love" (p. 444). Americans also tend to have higher expectations of their marriages than others. They also tend to get out of their marriages if those expectations are not being met.

Divorce

In colonial times, divorce was sometimes a factor in the dissolution of marriages. Although there was wide variation from colony to colony, reasons such as adultery, bestiality, desertion, and impotence were among those given which resulted in a "partial (divorce from bed and board only) or [an] absolute" divorce. In most colonies, there was a sex-bias against women in the granting of divorces (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987, p. 8). After the Revolutionary War, petitions by women for divorce increased, the reason mainly given being the husband's adultery. More divorces were granted, apparently, because of the new republic's desire to have a more virtuous and (maritally) faithful citizenry (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley,1987, p. 9). During the Victorian Era, divorce was greatly debated. Politicians and churches espoused either liberal or conservative views, respectively, the latter group saying that it was, "little more than registered concubinage," (Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987, p. 9).

It was not until 1860 that fairly reliable records were kept on the number of divorces. Immediately prior to the Civil War the rate was 1.2 divorces per 1000 existing marriages. This rose to 4 per 1000 by the turn of the century (Ihinger-

Tallman & Pasley, 1987). Cherlin (1981) indicated that divorce rates continued to grow from 1860 until 1960. The rise was gradual and steady, broken only by sharp increases after major wars and decreases during times of economic depression. In the early 1960s, the divorce rate took a sudden upturn. This trend continued for the next 20 years, peaking around 1979-1981. Finally, in 1982, it showed a slight decrease and began to level off (Preister, 1986). In spite of the continuous rise in the rate of divorce, from colonial times to the present, it was not until 1973 or 1974 when the rate of divorce exceeded the rate of death as a leading cause for the dissolution of marriages (Glick, 1980). Divorce rates have been stabilizing since the early 1980s (Glick, 1989).

Taking into account the above stabilization, Americans still divorce at record rates. The median time spent in marriages today is 7 years. Estimates vary, but one source states that, "One out of three first marriages entered into this year will end in divorce; if remarriages are included, one out of every two marriages begun this year will end in divorce. Perhaps a more accurate projection is that roughly 45 % of all first marriages and 55 % of all second marriages will likely end in divorce" (Preister, 1986, p. 10). Divorce does not appear to be a passing phenomenon in America; it seems to be the preferred way Americans resolve the issue of a marriage they can no longer tolerate (Preister, 1986). Reasons for the increase in divorce are many, but some of the ones given are:

- greater number of women in the work force, decreased emphasis on child-rearing as full time job,
- increased educational levels and independence of women,
- the rise of "individualism" in this country,

- the notion that "romantic love" should exist in a marriage
- the idea that one should "get out" if it does not exist,
- greater equality among the sexes in all spheres,
- the idea that single parents are "OK,"
- the general acceptance of divorce as a "way of American life" (Furstenberg, 1980, Goetting, 1982).

Remarriage

While the divorce rates rose sharply and then stabilized after 1960, the remarriage rates rose then declined. The two related processes seemed to have reached an equilibrium, causing estimates of remarried families and numbers of children living in those homes to be about the same now as they were in the early 1970s (Glick, 1989). Cherlin and McCarthy found in 1980 that 20% of all marriages were remarriages (Preister, 1986). Of those who remarry, 90% of them have been divorced (Glick, 1980). Among the divorced, 83% of men and 75% of women, or 80% of the total, will remarry (Preister, 1986). One million persons annually decide to get remarried, swelling the ranks of the fifty million who are already remarried (Garfield, 1980). Echoing Cherlin & McCarthy (above), Glick (1989) found that remarriages account for 21% of all existing marriages in the United States (p. 25).

The average amount of time people remain in the "divorced state," that is, between marriages, is three years (Glick, 1980). Men, in general, tend to marry sooner and marry more attractive women who are five to ten years younger, the average age differential being six years. Women, however, tend to marry men who are older and more financially secure than they are (Glick, 1980). In studies pertaining to women, educational levels correlate negatively with divorce and remarriage. In other words, the lower a woman's educational level, the higher are her chances of divorce up through graduation from college. After that the divorce levels increase with educational levels (Glick, 1980). In the case of remarriage, the higher a woman's educational and income level, the less likely she is to remarry.

On the other hand, for men, the higher the educational and income level, the greater the chance for remarriage (Glick, 1980). The differences in the remarriage rates of the sexes may be explained by the financial factor. Glick (1980) suggests that, "women may weigh the decision to remarry more carefully when they support themselves adequately, or men may feel threatened by financially independent women" (p. 474). Furthermore, a woman who does not work, or who does not want to work, and has small children has a high chance of remarriage. Glick (1980), states that, in one survey "marriage looked good to those with preschoolers, who found working outside the home difficult (83% remarried); among the childless who had careers outside the home, only 43% remarried" (p. 472).

"Singleness is seen as a way station rather than a destination," as people approach remarriage with "less idealism and more realism" (Furstenberg, 1980, p. 446). Some of the reasons for remarriage include:

- notion of "romantic love;

- societal and familial pressures to be 'normal':
    - get remarried,
    - to re-establish a "real home" for children;
- to meet needs for companionship, emotional closeness and sex;
- to meet needs for communication, sympathy and trust (Furstenberg, 1980, 1987).

Divorced persons tend to choose other divorced persons and attempt to select someone different (at least in their perception) from their former spouses (Preister, 1986, p. 12). Courtships tend to be gradual, erratic, and intense, and the remarriages tend to be practical and private affairs (Garfield, 1980). Some reports indicate that remarriages have an overall higher level of satisfaction than do first marriages, however, as earlier stated,while the divorce rate for first marriages is 45%, the redivorce rate for second marriages is 55%. One reason given for the high rate of redivorce is that having been through the trauma of divorce once, they know the process and know they could "survive" it again (Glick, 1980).

Children In Remarried Families

In 1987, there were 11 million remarried families, 4.3 million of which were stepfamilies. This is a very conservative look at the number of children, minor or grown, who are affected by the remarriage of one or both of their parents. Glick (1989) explains,

> The wide difference between the 11 million remarried families and the much smaller 4.3 million stepfamilies in 1987 is accounted for primarily by the fact that only one half (5.2 million)

> of the remarried families had young children in the household. The other one half included several different family compositions. Some of the remarried men and women never had any children or did have some young children, all of whom were living elsewhere. Also, many of the remarried families with no young children nonetheless had older children (18 years and older) either in the home, or living elsewhere, but according to [Glick's] terminology, none of these remarried families are treated as stepfamilies (p. 24).

Of those people remarrying, 60% bring children into the marriage; for women the figure is 70% (Glick, 1989, Preister, 1986). The most recent figures indicate that, in 1987, 8.78 million children under 18 lived in stepfamilies, and that 5.85 million of them were stepchildren. Of all the children in the United States, under 18, 19.1% lived in stepfamilies and 12.7% of them were stepchildren (Glick, 1989). The magnitude of these figures alone indicates the need for all helping professionals, especially school personnel, to better understand the characteristics and needs of stepfamilies in order to better serve this permanent and growing form of American family.

Mark Twain said, "there are lies, damn lies, and statistics" indicating, as only he could, that the numbers, alone, do not always tell the whole story. While the figures above are strictly correct within the limits of Glick's definition of stepfamily, they tell only part of the story. Glick (1989), statistician though he may be, is well aware of this fact. Consequently, he proposes two ways to further conceptualize the numbers in stepfamilies:

First, he suggests that if the entire number of persons involved in remarried or stepfamily situations, the entire "binuclear family system," were to be included in the figures, the amount would rise to 10-15% of the entire population of 250 million Americans, or 25-37.5 million people.

Second, he proposes that, if the ages and places of residence of the sons and daughters of remarried adults were to be disregarded, "well over 1/2 of today's young persons could be stepchildren by the year 2000" (p. 26). If, in less than one decade, one out of every two young persons will be a member of a stepfamily, the implications for all who deal with youth are substantial. To not understand or to ignore the differences faced by these families would be a gross oversight.

The focus of the next three chapters concerns the specific issues which differentiate stepfamilies from "normal," intact families. In some cases these issues are unique to the stepfamily situation, while in others the are similar to those in "normal" intact families, but differ in degree. The topics presented here are ones suggested by several of the major researchers and clinicians working in the field of stepfamilies. These issues are not discrete entities, as each area overlaps and affects the others. For the purposes of this report they are divided (by chapters) into the following major categories: structural issues, affective issues, and parenting issues.

CHAPTER III. STRUCTURAL ISSUES

The stepfamily is the "most structurally dissimilar" of all family forms from the nuclear family (Visher, 1979, p. 18). Perhaps the most obvious reason for this structural difference is that a stepfamily is created by the joining of persons who were formerly members of two, or more, intact families.

Biological Parent Elsewhere

The new family has to contend with the fact that the children each have a biological parent living "elsewhere" (Vishers, 1979, p. 16). Even if that parent has died, or seldom contacts his children, his "presence" is felt. For example, "children may withhold affection for the new stepparent and direct it toward the absent biological parent" (Albrecht, et.al., 1983, p. 143). If both adults in the new stepfamily have brought children into the marriage, there are (at least) two other biological parents who may regularly influence stepfamily interaction and plans from a distance.

Sharing Children

Stepfamily adults generally have to share their children with the other biological parents. The sharing arrangements vary from couple to couple, from child to child, sometimes changing as the children grow older. This necessitates communication and negotiation between the natural parents of each child. Depending upon the relationship between these former spouses, these contacts can be brief and businesslike or stressful and conflicted. Children "ferry back-and-forth between the two households" (Sager, et.al., 1980, p. 20) with a frequency which varies anywhere from daily to only a two-week period in the summer. A typical schedule is one where the child has his primary residence in one household, but spends alternate weekends, many holidays, and much time in the summer, at the other household.

Maintaining Contact with Both Parents

The Vishers (1988) state that, "it is important, in most situations, for children to maintain contact with both of their parents after a divorce." They further state that, "children who are cut off from a parent have a poorer overall adjustment and have greater difficulty forming relationships with their stepparents" (p. 184). Maintaining regular and frequent contact helps both children and adults clarify their roles and tasks in the stepfamily system, thus clarifying the boundaries. In order for this frequent and regular contact between parents and their non-custodial children to take place comfortably, stepfamilies need to have more "permeable" boundaries than nuclear families do (Visher, 1988, p. 188). Sometimes parents have fears of "losing" the child to the "other household," causing them to resist the looser boundaries.

Children Used as Pawns, Feeling Guilt

If the natural parents of stepchildren are still very angry or bitter over the divorce or related issues, children can easily, and often do willingly, become pawns in their battles. Parents, still reeling from earlier pain and conflict and not wishing to reopen fragile wounds may, and often do, use children as conduits of their words and feelings and as instruments in attempts to strike out at, or control, one another. In a power play between the parents, the children can become very adept at manipulating both parents, playing one against the other, but never really feeling "taken care of" or comfortable. This is a serious abdication of responsibility on the part of the parents and it places children in a powerful, and very destructive, position. Children end up feeling very torn and conflicted, angry at both parents, fearful and "out of control." Being kept out of the parental strife, not being made a "spy" or "messenger" (Visher & Visher, 1988, p. 236), allows the child to simply enjoy being a kid with his other parent.

Many children unconsciously feel very guilty about the divorce, thinking that they somehow were the "cause of it all." Also, most children, even grown children, deeply wish for and fantasize about the remarriage of their natural parents. Since the guilt is very uncomfortable to bear, and the new marriage is not in their "game plan," they may try to sabotage the new relationship by acting out or withdrawing (Messinger & Walker, 1981, p. 436).

Trading Assurances

Frank discussions of these fears of "losing" the child to the other household with trusted friends, knowledgeable and experienced counselors, or the adults in the "other household" may allay these fears. Often both sides have these feelings and they can assure one another of mutual support for the benefit of their children (Visher, 1991). Conversations of the kind described above may not take place unless, or until, the former spouses have psychologically, as well as legally, separated. According to Garfield (1980),

> Divorce involves a mourning process and an acceptance of loss on the part of parents and children. This acceptance and the willingness to give up old emotional ties often lag far behind the settlement of legal, financial and issues....Spouses who have not been able to achieve this emotional separation from their former spouse often carry unresolved feelings of anger and disappointment with them into second relationships (pp. 5-6).

If one, or both, still has anger or bitterness toward the other, or if there is a strong need by either parent for approval from the former spouse, there may not be enough emotional distance for them to effectively work together.

Boundary Issues

Boundary problems are another major structural issue of stepfamilies. According to Minuchin (1974), "The family system differentiates and carries out its functions through subsystems. Individuals are subsystems within a family. Dyads such as husband-wife, or mother-child can be subsystems. Subsystems can be formed by generation, by sex, by interest, or by function. The boundaries of a subsystem are the rules defining who participates, and how" (p. 52-53).

Pre-Existing Parent/Child Relationship

By definition, in stepfamilies there are one or more parent-child relationships which predate the couple relationship (Visher & Visher, 1988, p. 10). In the case of an only, or oldest, child, he or she has often been raised to the status of companion, confidant, or helper to the parent during the single-parent stage. This child is known as a "parentified child" and the "intergenerational boundaries are blurred" (Visher & Visher, 1988, p. 200). When the parent remarries, the child is suddenly "displaced" and restoring those intergenerational boundaries "may be difficult" (Visher & Visher, 1988, p. 200). According to Keshet (1980), "The transition within the stepfamily from an affiliation of divided subsystems to a more unified whole is a complex and gradual process. The stepfamily will always have strongly bounded systems to which members remain loyal. The individual members and subunits of a stepfamily can, however, learn to join together to reach common goals and to enjoy common satisfactions" (p. 530-531). Depending upon the length, the quality and the closeness of this parent-child relationship, the resulting jealousy, resentment and conflict may cause serious problems in the new stepfamily.

Boundary Ambiguity

Boundary ambiguity is defined as, "the [stepfamily] not knowing who is in and who is out of the system...and who is performing what roles and tasks within the family system... it is this ambiguity rather than the [remarriage] itself that predicts the family level of stress" (Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1989, p. 46). However, open communication facilitates family functioning. Allowing expression of feelings of anger, fear, and confusion, encouraging questions, and having a clear definition of "who is in the system and what are his/her roles" can lessen the anxiety and help stepfamily members relate more realistically and comfortably. One study (Anderson & White, 1986) found that functional stepfamilies do not exclude a member, indicating that all members of the "suprasystem" (Visher and

Visher, 1988) are to be included. Of course, a stepfamily's boundaries can never be as clear and constant as those of an intact family; these undefined and unclear boundaries can be very confusing and stressful for both children and adults.

Another facet of boundary ambiguity is that there are "psychological" and "physical" components (Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1989, p. 46). For example, an ex-spouse may be physically absent, but emotionally very involved with a child, and would therefore be considered "psychologically" present. On the other hand, a new stepparent may be very physically present in the house, but emotionally "shut out" the children, rendering him "psychologically" absent.

Boundaries More Permeable and Clear

According to Minuchin (1974), "for proper family functioning, the boundaries of subsystems must be clear...the composition of subsystems organized around family functions is not nearly as significant as the clarity of subsystem boundaries" (p. 54). According to Pasley (1987), "boundary ambiguity [in stepfamilies] is influenced by boundary permeability and boundary clarity" (p. 209). Permeability has to do with the "openness of boundaries, with the flow of people in and out for various purposes" (Pasley, 1987, p. 208). Within the stepfamily, itself, there are boundaries which need clarification and strengthening. On the "family" level, the stepfamily's tasks are to make the boundaries more permeable and clear than might be found in "normal" intact families.. According to the Vishers (1988), "stepfamily households need to have 'permeable' boundaries to allow the children to have the freedom to go back and forth easily and gain from the diversity of experiences offered by their different households ...[and while] children may have membership in two households, each household needs to feel that there is a clear psychological, and, for many adults, a clear physical boundary around each of the two households" (p. 188).

Generational Boundaries

The generational boundary, the boundary between the marital-parental couple and the children's generation, needs to be strong. Minuchin (1974) and Lewis (1976) stated that a "strong parental coalition" was important to healthy family functioning. In a stepfamily, where the couple bond is the newest one in the family, a conscious and continuous effort should be made to nourish and strengthen it. Parents often feel guilty at having formed this new bond and "abandoned" their children; "parentified" children sometimes feel rejected and confused. Satisfactory family functioning does appear to depend upon adequate boundaries between generations in all families (Minuchin, 1984). Furthermore, the research shows and clinicians impressions confirm, that stepfamily integration and acceptance by stepchildren is facilitated by a strong and vital couple relationship (Sager, et.al., 1980, Visher & Visher, 1988).

Subsystem Boundaries

Also, within the stepfamily, as with any family, there are subgroups, subsystems who form an alliance, erecting their own little "boundaries," for a time or for life (Keshet, 1980). Sometimes it is same-sex siblings who are close in age, sometimes a mother and daughter. These alliances are normal and usually fulfill some temporary and necessary purpose. Generally, they shift and change with time. A stepfamily has a "built in" alliance of this type: the biological parent and his or her children. According to Anderson & White (1986), "a stepfamily can have moderate levels of biological parent/child coalitions and perhaps still function effectively as a family unit" (p. 418). Acknowledging the "specialness" of these subgroups, and allowing time and space for their nurturance is probably the wisest and healthiest course to take. Open communication about feelings and clear statements about behavior regarding these relationships helps to assure that the needs of all members are being considered.

Personal Boundaries

Furthermore, each individual has unique psychological, physical and spiritual boundaries which need definition and maintenance (Visher & Visher, 1988, p. 202). They are best described as, "knowing where one's skin begins and the other's leaves off." Generally, there is a "comfort zone" within which an individual's boundaries expand outward if distance is needed and contract inward if closeness is desired. Suddenly finding oneself surrounded by "extra" parents, children or siblings, having to share bathrooms, refrigerator space, and television time, can seriously disturb these boundaries. Careful planning for each member to have adequate time and space, and allowing for wide variations in individual differences will make stepfamily integration easier.

Complex Extended Family Structures

Additional Sets of Family Members

"Remarriage after divorce does not mean that a person exchanges one family for another; instead it means that the individual takes on an additional family" (Goetting, 1982, p. 221). Closely related to the family itself are the extended family members and friends. The divorces and subsequent remarriage of the marital couple have somewhat disrupted the family structures of social lives of these important "significant persons." Perhaps these peripheral "others" are angry, hurt, or confused and have not accepted these events. Perhaps they, like the children, would like things to be "back the way they used to be." These persons can make hurtful remarks, treat new stepfamily members as if they were invisible, and possibly retard, or defeat, the new stepfamily's integration process. An additional family means extra "Moms" and "Dads" and siblings, of course. But, it also means extra sets of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, close family friends and neighbors. Bohannan (1970) says that these "complex" families form what he calls "divorce chains." Another researcher calls this phenomenon "linked families" (Dowling, 1983, p. 59). The Vishers (1988), use the term "suprasystem," referring to the immediate members of the stepfamily, their non-custodial children living elsewhere, the "other" biologic parents of their custodial children, grandparents, and stepgrandparents (p. 28). All of these people have an impact on the stepfamily on a repeated, if not regular, basis.

In stepfamilies there are many roles which do not occur in "normal" intact families: there are various kinds of dyadic subsystems, there are stepmothers, stepfathers, and stepchildren. The roles are not well defined in our society. "Step" does not mean "real" (Albrecht, et.al., 1983, p. 143), but what does it mean? If the various possible combinations of children, parents, grandparents, step and natural, are considered, the complexity begins to boggle the mind. This does not even begin to include aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. Each subsystem has boundaries, rules and behaviors which are unique to that system at that stage of family development and to those individuals. As the family evolves through the stages, the changes in the dyadic relationships and the shifts in power can cause stress to the whole system and be sources of family conflict. It is very helpful to stepfamily adjustment and future smooth functioning if the various subsystems are recognized, conflicts are resolved, and boundaries are redefined appropriately.

There are two basic ways to view this phenomenon. First of all, emphasis could be placed on the complexity of the family system. The potential for complicated situations, confusion for the family members, and the impossibility of "keeping up with all those people," could paint a gloomy picture for stepfamilies. On the other hand, focusing on the potential for enrichment in a child's life, extra adults to share the work of child-rearing, and allowing the new relationships to develop naturally over time, puts it in a positive and hopeful light.

Stepmother

The role of stepmother will be discussed again in the next chapter with special reference made to the stigma of "wickedness" attached to the role and the accompanying feelings. However, structurally speaking, even by having the awareness of this "handicap" and making allowances for it, research indicates that stepmothers have varying levels of adjustment problems. Studies indicate that women with natural children and no stepchildren have the highest level of adjustment, women with no natural children and some stepchildren have the most difficult time, and women with both natural and stepchildren have moderate adjustment problems (Vishers, 1979, Kosinski, 1983).

Stepfather

Stepfathers do not have the strong, traditional "bad image" handed down through fables; "there are many stories involving cruel stepfathers, but these are in adult literature and do not appear in children's fairy tales" (Vishers, 1979, p. 85). The stepfather's role is one that is not clearly defined anywhere, forcing each stepfather to make up his own set of rules. The Vishers (1979) stated that, "In a society in which the more obvious functions of the father are financial and educational, because there is still a natural father elsewhere, the stepfather is often left with only a partial financial obligation and a [limited] socialization or educational function" (p. 86).

Predictably, there are two areas which seem to give many stepfathers problems: discipline and money. Many stepfathers tend to "come on too strong, too soon," in trying to discipline their stepchildren. Mothers tend to be ambivalent: glad to get the help, but feeling like "he's too hard on my kids" (Kosinski, 1983). Many men feel guilty about having left their natural children and may over-indulge them when they visit (Visher & Visher, 1979, Kosinski, 1983). This may further increase the resentment of the stepchildren who may already not like the newly-installed disciplinarian (Kosinski, 1983, p. 203). Money is another area which causes problems. A stepfather may resent the amount of money going to his ex-wife (even if it is for his natural children), and he may feel anxious or resentful about using money sent to his current wife by her ex-husband (even if it is for the stepchildren)(Kosinski, 1983, p. 203).

Generally, both stepmothers and stepfathers should proceed slowly with their stepchildren. They should try to become "friends" first, as loving relationships take time. Being warm and supportive of (the natural parent's) their spouse's parenting, available and flexible with stepchildren are good ways to interact. Amicable, working relationships are reasonable and realistic goals.

Stepchildren

Stepchildren often struggle with the question of, "Where do I belong?" (Vishers, 1979, p. 170). Sometimes shuttling back-and-forth between households does not allow them to feel "at home" in either place.

Along with the issue of having to "fit in" in two households, there is the issue of "turf." If there are stepsiblings, jealousy and open conflict can easily occur. Depending upon the living arrangements, the ages of the children, the nature of the parent-child relationship, and the general emotional health of the individuals, stepsibling rivalry can be escalated or mediated. It is important for parents and stepparents alike to remember that sibling rivalry is "normal" in all families and that the process of sorting out "turf" and "time" (with parents, TV, toys, telephone, pets, etc.) helps children learn how to work out peer relationships. They learn how to ask for what they want, stick up for themselves, share (albeit, unwillingly); they learn from each other, protect and defend one another and have some "control" in their own dominion. This is an essential part of growing up and prepares children to deal with the world of school, work and adult relationships. Having a special room, or area, of their own, being given time to adjust upon arriving for visits, is another way to give stepchildren some sense of "being in control" of part of their lives. Also, having chores and privileges which are uniquely theirs, and being casually and consistently accepted as "part of the family," in both homes eases the transition back-and-forth and increases their comfort level.

Another area that is troublesome to some children is the problem of what to call the stepparent. One stepparent is quoted as saying, "You're lucky if they call you anything!" (Visher & Visher, 1988, p. 224). While the adults may have a preference of "Mom" or "Dad," it is better to let the child take the lead and find a name with which he is comfortable. This is another way to allow the child some choice and power in a situation where he may feel helpless and overwhelmed.

Stepfamily Happiness

Furstenberg (1987) reports, "the vast majority of stepfamilies appear to function rather well...[there is] little to distinguish the overall description of family life, offered by both parents and children, in step- and first-marriage families" (p. 56). Regarding children, Furstenberg goes on to say that, "Children in stepfamilies perform about the same as children in single-parent households...both are somewhat less well adjusted at home and in school than adolescents who are living with both biological parents." However, results are mixed: The Vishers (1988) quote a number of studies which found positive results from stepfamily living. They quote Furstenberg as saying,

"...remarriage has the consequence of distributing a diminishing pool of children among a larger circle of adults...for children that means being connected to a great number of adults who are prepared to treat them as kin...family networks are reinforced and parenting can be shared by a larger kinship group" (p. 5-6).

CHAPTER IV. AFFECTIVE ISSUES

All families deal with feelings. Stepfamilies, because of the structural differences described in the preceding chapter, are subject to some feelings born of their unique situations and some more intense feelings in certain areas. Society, in general, does not always recognize and make room for these different kinds of affective needs. This chapter will discuss some of those areas which cause unusual and stronger feelings than might be felt in a "normal", intact family to which the stepfamily might appear similar on the surface. These include feelings engendered by cultural "myths," societal prejudice against stepfamilies, stepmothers, stepfathers, stepchildren, powerful feelings caused by the losses endured by stepfamily members prior to the formation of the stepfamily, disappointment about lowered levels of cohesiveness than members might like, and different kinds of divided loyalty conflicts for all family members.

Myths

Deep within the American culture are many myths regarding family life; these myths are applied to stepfamilies as well. When reality does not match the myth, sometimes the result can be great emotional turmoil and conflict. The myths come from fairy tales, literature, movies or other forms of media which depict family life. These myths are generally accepted and seldom questioned. As they are perpetuated from generation to generation, the cultural lore becomes cultural truth. Currently, television (i.e., the Brady Bunch) is probably the most powerful way these false ideas regarding family, or stepfamily, life are imparted.

Myth: "We Will All Be One Big Happy Family and Instantly Love One Another."

One such idea regarding stepfamiles, which is definitely a myth, is that of "instant love," which says that all stepfamily members should "instantly" love one another (Kosinski, 1983, Vishers, 1988). Hopefully, the new marital couple love each other, but, at least in the beginning, that is all the stepfamily can, or should, expect. It takes time for love to develop in any relationship. Just because a man and woman fall in love with each other and marry does not automatically mean they will each love the other's children or that the children will love the "new" parent.

This is quite different from intact families where children are born (or adopted as infants) into a family and parents have time to get used to the idea of being parents before the child arrives. Early in the relationship there is a "bonding" process with the parents and the infant and, subsequently, there are many years of growth during which the bond is strengthened and matures. Children identify and model themselves after their parents; parents teach, guide, protect and enjoy their children. Even the most uninvolved natural (or adoptive) parent in an intact family learns to love his children "warts and all."

If stepparents expect "instant love" from their stepchildren, or think they, themselves, "should" feel that "love" for the stepchildren, disappointment and frustration may cloud the relationship instead. When this "instant love" is not forthcoming, and it may take years to develop, family members often feel guilty and begin to have serious doubts about the new marriage. Or, if they pretend to have such feelings, before long resentment and/or a sense of isolation, because of the dishonesty, may develop. Sooner or later, anger and conflict will result. In order to avoid, or to mitigate, this situation, family members should be allowed, and encouraged, to openly express their feelings regarding the new stepparent or stepchild. Care should be taken to ensure that this expression be the individuals' feelings and not a critical and accusing list of others' "wrongdoings." Realistic and clearly stated expectations regarding courteous behavior and mutual sharing of the family's time, space, and resources should ease the tension during the early stages.

Myth: "Stepfamilies are Just Recreations of Intact Families"

Another deeply-ingrained cultural myth is that the stepfamily is simply a re-creation of the intact, nuclear family. Related to this idea is the expectation that stepfamilies should "feel" the integration that is "supposed to characterize the nuclear family" (Messinger & Walker, 1981, p. 435). This myth brings with it all of the "traditional" American ideals of "family," which have some common cultural bases, but differ in the details of their expression within American subcultures and individual families. For example, one American cultural ideal might be that "Families go to church on Sunday and have Sunday dinner together afterwards." Differing modes of expression of that ideal might be: cooking in the backyard with everyone pitching in to help, going to a fancy restaurant with Dad picking up the "tab," or going to Grandma's and listening to the crickets in the evening. Realistically, the busy intact families of today may spend Sundays cutting the grass, doing the week's grocery shopping, and cleaning the house. So, even an intact family might have trouble today with the "traditional" ideals. The average stepfamily, by definition, might be expected to have trouble with all of the foregoing simply because it is attempting to merge traditions from two different families.

At the time of its formation, the stepfamily, could contain within differing ideas of "what to do on Sundays," based on the members' experiences in their "old" families. Their ideas might be similar, but in attempting to meet the needs and wants of everyone, subtle differences will appear, and much conflict and frustration may result. Furthermore, stepfamilies often have to "share" children on weekends with the "other parent" in a different household with an even more different schedule. Trying to successfully carry out a stepfamily project or outing can be very complicated and, at times, seem impossible. This one simple example suggests the complexity which is inherent in stepfamilies. Intact families have conflicting schedules and needs, but in stepfamilies these issues are multiplied many times over. As stated above in the discussion of "instant love," clear communication can alleviate many of these problems. If each member is allowed to state needs and wants, if the stepfamily can plan for limited, but specific, times together, if expectations can be overtly stated and altered to fit reality, then the stepfamily can operate on a more peaceful and mutually-satisfying basis.

Stereotypes

Perhaps there is only a semantic difference between the idea of "myth" and that of "stereotype," but the former seems to refer to more all-encompassing and customary societal behavior, while the latter seems to refer more to characteristics of specific individuals. Coleman and Ganong (1987) state that, "individuals who are stereotyped may become the object of prejudice" (p. 19). It appears that the culture has "stereotyped" the behavior of certain individuals in stepfamilies, thus paving the way for prejudice. According to Ganong and Coleman (1987), several studies have tested the image of "stepmother and stepfather" as compared to "mother and father" and have found that "step" appears to be pejorative, signifying a more negative image.

The "Wicked" Stepmother

Fairy tales, such as "Hansel and Gretel," "Snow White," and "Cinderella," may have implanted the notion of the "wicked stepmother" firmly in the minds of the young, usually long before they actually have to face having a "real stepmother" (Coleman & Ganong, 1987, p. 22). Consciously or not, this idea lurks in the minds of both adults and children. Stepmothers usually try very hard at first to please their stepchildren, sometimes neglecting themselves, their natural children and the marital relationship in the process. The stepchildren may resent her attempts and reject her. Having apparently "failed," the stepmother may then begin to resent the stepchildren. The frustrated biological father, feeling torn between his wife and his children, may begin to resent her and all the children. She may begin to feel and look and act like a real "wicked stepmother!" Once again, clear statements regarding the concerns and expectations of all stepfamily members will help to bring reality into focus and dispel "magical," unspoken, fears. Stepmothers should proceed slowly with their stepchildren, not attempting to replace, or "make up for," the absent biological parent. They should strive to be a friend, a helpful additional adult, in the children's lives.

The "Poor, Forgotten" Stepchild

Coleman and Ganong (1987) state that there is "widespread use in our culture of the word 'stepchild' as a metaphor for neglect" (p. 20). Another study (Bryan, et.al.,1986) commented, "Though the term wicked is readily associated with stepmother, and abusive has been recently linked with stepfather, it may be that the frequent use of stepchild to mean poor, neglected, and ignored has had an insidious impact on attitudes over time" (p. 173). The "poor, forgotten, stepchild," conjures up images of a sad and pasty-faced young Cinderella of a child who is left at home and ignored, well-fed, but lonely, physically cared for, but unaffirmed.

Stepfamily Identity Dilemma

Another indication that stereotypes exist regarding stepfamilies as a whole can be determined by a quick survey of popular literature and the terminology used by various clinicians to describe stepfamilies. Because of the negative connotations which the prefix "step" engenders, a plethora of synonymous descriptors has emerged: aggregate, amalgamated, bi-nuclear, blended, combined, combination, compound, composite, consolidated, extended, joint, merged, metafamily, mixed, multimarriage, multiparent, Rem, reconstituted, reconstructed, recoupled, recreated, recycled, reformed, remarried, remerged, reorganized, restructured, second, second time around, split and synergistic (Coleman & Ganong, 1987, p. 21, Melder, Dameron, Strother & DeNardo, 1987, p. 50). Stepparents are called non-parents, not-parents, not "real" parents, "his" wife and "her" husband. One family used the term, "sociological mother," as an unusual alternative (Coleman and Ganong, 1987, p. 21). Whatever the alias, the fact that there seems to be a need for one indicates that there is some "tainted" quality to the prefix "step," or the idea, of "stepfamily" and that some "whitewashing" should be done.

Another indicator of the negative stereotyping received by stepfamilies is the tendency of stepfamilies to present themselves as intact families (Visher & Visher, 1979, Coleman & Ganong, 1987). Whether they are trying to live up to the myth of the "recreation of the nuclear family," joining in the massive societal denial of this sleeping giant, trying to avoid tedious explanations, or trying avoid the ignorance and stares of others, is probably different for every stepfamily. But, the fact that they repeatedly ignore or misrepresent their identity to the general public must have some root cause.

Prejudice of Cultural Milieu

Another major, but much more subtle, arena of stepfamily stereotyping and prejudice is the cultural milieu. Researchers, textbook writers, and clinicians in the field of family health are not immune to bias and often unwittingly increase the negative image. Researchers tend to study the "problems" in stepfamilies, textbook writers sometimes ignore the phenomenon and write more extensively on more esoteric, and less common, topics, and clinicians' impressions tend to be colored by their stepfamily client populations who, by virtue of the fact that they are seeking counseling, have "a problem." The clergy and the legal profession often operate on meager and out-of-date information about stepfamilies and are subject themselves to personal prejudices. Schools often ignore stepfamily situations, treating all children as if they lived in intact families, sending report cards to, and arranging conferences with, only one household. Sometimes school personnel even "side" with one parent and bar the other parent (or the stepparent) from access to school records or school functions.

Social organizations, such as the Boy Scouts, Indian Guides, and many church-related or civic activities, are geared toward the nuclear, intact family. Such activities as "Blue-and-Gold Banquets," "mother-daughter campouts" and fathers coaching Little League Baseball could present some awkwardness and hurt feelings in families where the only available and appropriate "parent" happens to be a stepparent.

Major social events such as weddings and graduations have not changed their traditions rapidly enough to encompass and accommodate this new, greatly expanded and awkward, family form. Social customs and mores need to change in recognition of this growing and permanent addition to the American culture. Some small, but significant, changes are evident: greeting card companies are beginning to produce special cards for "stepparents," and there is a movement afoot to institute a "National Stepparent's Day." As the numbers of stepfamilies increase, and as children who grew up in stepfamilies become adults and therefore more influential in society, things will change. But, like many other cultural movements, change is slow and takes a generation, or two.

Change

The one constant in life, it has often been said, is change. One of the criteria for determining if something is alive is whether it "changes and grows."

People who do not seem to change, who become "stuck in their ways," are sometimes referred to as having "died emotionally." So, it seems, that to be vital and healthy, there must be growth and change. However, the fact that change is constant does not mean that it is easy. Change is difficult for most people, whether it be an exciting, predictable and happily-anticipated change, or whether it be a devastating, "out-of-the-blue" and very painful change. All are affected by change, and depending upon the intensity and the nature of the change, and depending upon the age, maturity and coping level of the persons involved, many different kinds of "feeling" reactions can result. These feelings need recognition and attention in order for any person, especially stepfamily members to "move on" with their lives in a healthy and productive manner.

Predictable and Unpredictable Changes

There are predictable changes in families as children are born, grow up and go out on their own, parents move through the stages of adulthood, and the older generation approaches senescence and dies. These are the normal, expected kinds of changes, stressors, to the family system, called the "developmental life cycle transitions" In all families there are also the "unpredictable stressors," major unforeseen events which shake the family's stability. Events such as death, divorce, financial crisis, chronic illness, all fall in this latter category (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988, p. 9). Furthermore, if the emotional health of the family, "the patterns of relating and functioning that are transmitted down the generations in a family" are themselves dysfunctional, [even a small stressor encountered] in dealing with the "changes and transitions of the family life cycle" could "create great disruption in the system" (McGoldrick & Carter, 1982, p. 169).

While even the normal developmental stressors can, and sometimes do, produce resistance, instability, and painful feelings in most families, the unexpected stressors very often cause great difficulties for all family members. Major losses are always the precursors to the formation of a stepfamily: usually divorce, and sometimes, death, the two most stressful single events of a lifetime, according to the Holmes Rahe Social Readjustment Ratings Scale (Kirsta, 1986, p. 27). Either of these two events, death or divorce, can,and usually does, profoundly shake up a family system, with the reverberations being felt among the extended family and friends, also. The Vishers (1988) speak to this issue:

> All changes, wished for or not, involve loss. Very rarely are changes a relinquishing only of negative situations and relationships. Even when we move toward something that is desired, we leave behind people, experiences, places that have meant a great deal to us. For stepfamily members, the changes and losses that they experience are more in number and of much greater magnitude than typically occur in the early years of first marriages. Indeed, we sometimes say that a stepfamily is a family born of loss (p. 91).

Denial

Denial is a "defense mechanism" employed at various times by everyone. By definition, if it is a "defense mechanism," one does not know when he is "in denial." To be "in denial" is to unconsciously avoid awareness of something, usually something unpleasant or painful. Denial, by itself, is not a feeling in the strict sense, but it is what people often employ to avoid feelings, especially the uncomfortable ones. At times, it is appropriate and useful. For example, immediately after major trauma, people are usually said to be "in shock," a form of denial. After some time has past, the reality of the event begins to creep into the conscious mind and people begin to feel the associated feelings, try to understand "what happened," and make plans to move on. This is a normal healthy process: grieving. To stop this grieving process is to go into greater denial. A tremendous amount of energy must often be spent to maintain the illusions which allow a person to remain in denial. Remaining in denial can be manifested in various ways. Often a person's attentions are focused on "living in the past" or controlling external events in the present or worrying about the future. Often, the person becomes physically ill, emotionally disturbed, or lives a rigid or chaotic sort of life. If this becomes a lifetime pattern, it is impossible for a person to live a full and happy life. Einstein (1987) put it this way:

> Denying feelings is a common way to deal with difficulties arising in new remarriages. But denial merely dulls the pain; it doesn't eliminate the feelings or clarify the situation. Too many remarrieds deny their negative feelings because they fear that talking about them will stir up greater troubles. Actually, just the opposite is true. Unrecognized and unshared feelings can topple your remarriage. Dealing with feelings honestly can help bring the family closer, building a stronger family unit (p. 60).

Grief

In order for the stepfamily to able to form its own unique identity and function smoothly, it is necessary for family members to grieve their losses (Einstein & Albert, 1986). As long as there is denial of the magnitude and kinds of losses, or even an acknowledgement of the very fact that there has been a loss, there will be an impediment to the healthy integration of the stepfamily. Of course, it takes time and acceptance to be able to grieve. Each member will do it in an unique way, and in his or her own time, but losses of this nature must be grieved or a full commitment to the present and future cannot be made. It is important to talk openly about the need to grieve, to give permission to members to be angry, to be sad, to cry. This is a time when extended family members, friends, clergy, physicians, school counselors and therapists can be very supportive and helpful. Grieving cannot be forced, but it can be encouraged and accepted. Helping family members be aware of their own and the others' need to grieve, giving them tools and support, allowing the process to proceed, and letting them know that "there is light at the end of the tunnel," are all ways professionals can help.

Loss

Loss is painful, and, since man cannot stay in pain for long, he generally does one of two things: he finds some way to deny the loss, and "stuffs" the pain, or he "deals" with the loss and, by so doing, he decreases the pain. Much has been written on the subject of loss and the need to grieve. Kubler-Ross (1969) has been a pioneer in the field of "death and dying" and has written about the stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (p. 263). Whether or not `grieving is done in the order, or even the specific stages, outlined in Kubler-Ross' work, it appears that there are sequential stages and a "mixed bag" of emotions which must be sorted out with every loss. This is true whether the grief is for the death of a parent, the "death" of a marriage, or the death of a pet. Other kinds of losses, friends, home environment, careers, health, all require a similar, though perhaps not as intense or prolonged, kind of grieving. Furthermore, a cluster of losses, such as might occur around the divorce and remarriage process, can have a sizable cumulative effect.

Children and adults who have moved through the various stages of the separation/death/divorce/single-parent/remarriage cycle and have undergone a multitude of changes, have endured many losses. Many are obvious and addressed, but some are subtle and remain undetected. If they are unrecognized, or are not given an adequate amount of time for resolution, they can be a chronic source of future problems. For the purposes of this report, losses are grouped into three major categories: loss of persons, loss of places, and loss of things.

Loss of "persons"

Loss of "persons" relates to various kinds of relationship losses suffered by persons in stepfamilies. These include all the "significant other" kinds of losses, such as, adult partners, parents, extended family, neighbors, friends, teachers, and even the loss of "self." Adults have lost marriage partners, through death or divorce, and some have lost at least the daily contact with their children. Children have lost or lessened the contact with one of their parents. Grandparents and other extended family members have lost, or at least changed, often lessened, their former relationships with both the adults and the children in the torn apart and reformed marriages. Some family members have had to move, causing loss of friendships, teachers and other support systems. The loss of the peer group, while difficult at any age, can be, and usually is, particularly devastating to a teenager for whom this group has become increasingly more important.

Furthermore, most children and teenagers, especially young teenagers, have not suffered major losses before all the events surrounding the divorce and remarriage happened. They may feel like they will never recover, will not survive. Even though the remarriage appears to be uniting families, children and adults often have to grieve the loss of formerly close parent-child relationships in the single-parent stage.

Another, more subtle, relationship loss, is loss of "self." The ripping apart of a family suddenly forces each member to struggle with "Who am I?" kinds of questions. A woman is no longer "his wife," a man no longer is "her husband." And, although the parent-child relationship continues, children struggle with questions of their "place" or "role" in the lives of their parents and in the split and reformed families (Vishers, 1988, pp. 100-102). The child who has enjoyed so much attention from a single parent, or two, may wonder, "Just where do I fit in?" when the new stepparent and stepsiblings move in. The "baby" in the family may suddenly find himself as a "middle child;" The "only" child may suddenly become the oldest of three children and have less pampering and more responsibility. Feelings of failure, guilt, confusion, anger, pain and fear possibly hopelessness and chaos may, at some time in the process, strike at the core of each individual. As the sense of "family" is disrupted, so the self-esteem of the family members is, or may be, weakened. Listening, being "present," when family members need to talk, helping them identify, understand and accept these losses, encouraging them to express the feelings which they engender, are ways concerned persons can help.

Loss of "places"

Loss of "places" refers to the loss of the actual physical structures which generally surround a person throughout his day-to-day life. These includes such things as homes, neighborhoods, schools, churches and communities. Just one step out from the significant people in the lives of family members, are the places "where they live." These losses are not restricted to the separation/divorce period, alone. The formation of a stepfamily often entails an additional set of many such "environmental" changes. Inherent in the nature of a divorce and a subsequent remarriage is the fact that at least one person will move "in" or "out" in each of these events. Often several persons move or there are several sequential moves. By definition, a move involves a change and a change involves loss of place, or places. These places naturally include their homes, their neighborhoods, their places of work. For children, they also include their schools, their ball parks, and the local "mall." Loss of familiar medical and dental personnel, business, community and church affiliations are more of the same kinds of "environmental" losses. If the move is out of town or across the country, loss of familiar climate, accent, and local customs can all contribute to the total feeling of loss.

Changes in the amount of living space, daily family routines, and numbers of persons in the household, can result in loss of privacy, "peace and quiet," and comfortable, familiar patterns. Or, conversely, these changes could bring long periods of unaccustomed quiet, a significant drop in the level of activity in the household, no more "hustle-and -bustle" or the sounds of little feet. Losses of this nature, sometimes called "culture shock," are sometimes attributed to, and written off as, "just a little homesickness," and are not unknown in "normal" intact families who also often face major moves. However, when these losses of "places" are added to the already major relationship losses discussed earlier, they can be overwhelming to the members of a newly-formed stepfamily. Awareness, open discussion of these losses allowing the expression of their accompanying feelings, time, support, and acceptance all help to mediate these losses. Also, a gradual moving out into the new community, while maintaining some contact with the old community, will help ease the pain of transition.

Loss of "things"

Loss of "things" refers to the loss of any and all of those "things" which fill up people's lives. Things fall naturally into two categories: the tangible and the intangible. In times of major transition, family members can easily identify the loss of tangible things. The losses of intangible things are not always so immediately or easily noted. Furthermore, society does not generally permit the grieving of losses of things as readily as it does the grieving of persons or places. The lack of identification of the painful feelings associated with these kinds of losses and the lack of societal permission to grieve can delay and hinder the processes of transition and integration in stepfamilies.

Tangible Losses

In the area of the tangible, at the top of the list is money, and all the things money can buy. For most persons in divorced situations, there is a drastic change in their financial circumstances. The cost of the divorce itself, moving, counseling, and the maintenance of two households out of incomes which had once supported only one home, are only some of the financial burdens faced by divorced persons. Statistics reveal that for women, divorce generally reduces their incomes by 73%. Women receive custody of children in 90% of divorces; the burden of financial responsibility is generally increased for women, while their resources are decreased. For men, incomes generally rise by 43%. This financial inequity results not only in the loss of familiar environments, discussed above, but usually results in the custodial female parent having to find full-time employment, creating yet another loss, that of shared time in the pàrent-child relationship. Loss of money produces many immediate problems with which single parents have to grapple, and there is an additional sudden loss of security. The double income, the joint savings, the insurance policies, the pensions and investments which had been set aside for the divorcing couple's retirement are dissolved and divided. The future looks bleak, or, at best, uncertain.

Other "things" which may be lost include, furniture, boats, vacation homes. Even such seemingly minor things as favorite Christmas ornaments, books or record albums, can cause pain and grief when they are lost. Sometimes it is loss of the "little things" which seem so "silly" that people deny the most. Acknowledging the loss, and accompanying sadness, of even the minor things with a trusted friend or counselor can help a person "move on." Acknowledging the need to grieve the loss of these "things" can sometimes be very hard. It is not as socially acceptable to be sad about the loss of a "country club membership," money for vacations, and "the Grandfather clock," the social life of an ex-spouse, or the "ability to do whatever I want whenever I want" as it is to be sad about the loss of marriage and family.

Intangible Losses

Along with those very tangible and necessary "things" which are lost by family dissolution by death or divorce, are the losses of "intangibles." Loss of status, no longer being "a married person," or as "being connected with" a certain person, can be a profound loss for some. It can mean, among other things, the loss of daily routine, identity, social groups, access to certain organizations and financial benefits. Entering a stepfamily includes some of the same kinds of intangible losses. It can mean the loss of some independence and autonomy; it changes the ability and freedom to set one's schedule regardless of others; and the choices about activities and environment in daily life are more limited.

When a marriage ends and a family is torn apart, no matter how rational and mutual the decision is, there is a shattering of dreams. Visions of "they lived happily ever after," like the ideas of "wicked stepmothers" are planted in the minds of preschoolers everywhere. Two decades later, those preschoolers become young couples who plan and dream and hope, deep in their hearts, that their marriage "will be different and special." When they face each other in court, the dream crumbles. Giving up the illusion of "how it has been," allowing the dreams to die, can for some be more painful than giving up the actual marriage. Often accompanying this loss of illusions, is the loss of the belief structure which had maintained those illusions. An example of this could be, "If I try really hard and do a good job, keeping cookies in the jar and ruffles on the windows, everything will be all right." Or, from the male point of view, "If I bring home a paycheck twice a month and cut the grass, our family will be 'okay.'" When the marriage ends, adults and children alike sometimes suddenly find that all the beliefs which sustained them are open to question or no longer seem valid.

Trust is something which is built slowly. As infants, children learn to trust the world according to how their needs get met (Erikson, 1985). If their cries are ignored, or they are treated roughly or inconsistently, they learn that no one can be trusted and that the world is a dangerous and unpredictable place. If, however, they are gently handled, kept warm, fed, and dry, if they are touched and talked to and loved, they then learn to reach out and trust that the response of their parents, and the world, in general, will be good. When a family goes through death, or separation and divorce, followed by a very different and possibly difficult time as a single-parent family, the trust level of each of the family members generally drops. This happens because the trauma and pain of these kinds of events are not part of the normal, natural, expected life cycle of families, but they are what Carter & McGoldrick (1988) have called, "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (p. 10). The family members' sense of continuity and stability, essential for trust to flourish, has been shaken, if not shattered. It is hard to believe that the pain will ever end, that life could ever be good again. It is normal and natural for both adults and children to feel betrayed by life and develop some distrust.

Entering a stepfamily may cause the persons involved to anticipate going through similar feelings of loss. Having once adjusted to life in a single-parent family, they may resist moving into a stepfamily situation for fear of experiencing the trauma and pain again. Contemplating remarriage, both adults, and the children especially, may feel very distrustful of the future. Before causing yet one more major change, with all its accompanying upheaval, "singles-again" often weigh carefully the benefits of remarrying before they "step" into another permanent relationship.

Understanding and owning these broken dreams, sorting through their belief systems, expressing the feelings of pain, anger and sorrow, and beginning to rebuild new dreams and finding a more functional set of values are all part of the grieving process which people who will create successful stepfamilies must come through. "Time heals all wounds," is a societal myth which is often offered to the bereaved, the newly-divorced, or to anyone who has suffered a recent and major loss. Time alone, does not heal. Working through feelings, as well as taking the other steps mentioned above, over time, does heal (Melder, et.al., 1987, p. 55). Gradually, as stability improves, and family members' needs are more often met, trust between members, and for life in the future, in general, will increase.

Less Cohesion

The myth that "stepfamilies are just like nuclear families," discussed earlier, provides yet another dream for stepfamilies to give up (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988, p. 409). When the "instant love" does not come about, when the "other parent" interferes, when the children are shuffling back-and-forth between households, reality sets in: this family is different! It is not like a "normal" family! Guilt felt by the new husband over the lack of loving feelings toward "her" children, anger felt by children toward the "other parent," mixed feelings of sadness, loneliness, or relief, felt by adults when the children are at the "other house," these are only some of the situations which set stepfamilies apart from their "normal," intact counterparts.

At least in the beginning, there will be less cohesion in a stepfamily. According to Carter & McGoldrick (1988), "Functional stepfamilies have less intense [stepparent-child] relationships than do parents and children in intact families" (p. 404). This may cause some feelings of sadness, anger or other painful, powerful emotions. While the adults are excited and happy about entering the stepfamily, generally, the children are not. They have had little, or no, say in most of the major events which have rocked their lives, and this most recent change threatens to disrupt their lives even more. Understanding and accepting the children's feelings, giving them time to grieve and accept reality, being a warm, supportive "friend," all are important steps for adult stepfamily members to take. They, too, need to accept the fact that the stepchildren may never accept, much less learn to care for, them. Stepfamily members, afraid to bring up these feelings, afraid to "rock the boat," will suppress these feelings, or will stay in denial, pretending that "all is well," a condition called,"pseudomutuality" (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988, p. 408). Allowing these feelings to surface, and to be grieved prepares members to move into more realistic stepfamily functioning.

Satir (1972) has said, "the chances of spouses doing at least some things different from one another are just about 100 percent as neither was brought up in the same way" (p. 129). Focusing on things being "a little different than before" may be a healthy and helpful way to proceed. Incorporating as much of the old history, routines and traditions as possible, introducing a few changes, and creating some "new family" traditions, will ease the integration.

Divided Loyalties

One of the greatest problems stepfamilies face is that of "divided" or "conflicted" loyalties (Visher & Visher, 1988, p. 164).Children see themselves a composites of both their natural parents, and they love and want to be loved by both of them. When a stepparent is introduced into the picture, the problem of divided loyalty, which probably began when the natural parents first disagreed, separated and divorced, becomes greatly compounded. Children of divorce often feel that they must "take sides." If they love or enjoy being with one parent, they feel disloyal to the other one. When one (or both) parent remarries, the additional "parent" presents an additional problem to children. If they like, or have fun, with one of their biological parents and the new stepparent, are they betraying the other parent? If they "side" with the parent who remains single and resent or are openly hostile to the new stepparent, do they risk anger and rejection from their newly-remarried parent? Satir (1972) says, "Perhaps the single most serious problem faced by children in a blended family is that they are not free to love whomever they want to love," (p. 179).

Opposing Messages

A child will sometimes "get opposing messages, if parents are not open, honest and sharing," (Satir, 1972, p. 174). Parents may often, knowingly or not, direct their children to behave in opposite ways. The child often feels caught "in the middle," or is placed in an impossible "double bind." When this happens, it is important for the natural parents of a child to work out any highly emotionally-charged situations between themselves, and to avoid using the child to "get at" each other, or allowing the child to "become an expert at the game of manipulation, artfully playing one parent off against the other," (Franke, 1983, p. 199).

Destructive Messages

Although, some time may have passed since the divorce and much of the animosity may have subsided, "remarriage of a former spouse can open old wounds, even when single-parent life has settled down to a comfortable routine or the parent has remarried," (Franke, 1983, p. 196). It is especially important for parents to avoid making disparaging remarks about one another, or about the new stepparent, in the presence of the child. Satir (1972) states, "the attitude of a parent toward his ex-spouse is very important...anytime a child is asked to turn his back on and denounce either of his biological parents, he runs a great risk of developing [low self-esteem]" (p. 180).

Destructive Choices

Resentment, jealousy, anger, fear, and other such feelings are common and normal for adults to feel toward their ex-spouses following divorce and remarriage. In some cases, the stress and pain caused by this division of loyalties will cause a child to unilaterally choose "one side" and completely reject the other. He cannot stand the feeling of being torn apart, nor the guilt which derives from the constant feelings of "being disloyal," first to one parent and then the other. If this choice is made, a "cut off" relationship may be the result, severing the child from half of his heritage, possibly causing severe emotional problems in the future. Another, equally detrimental, way for a child to handle this split is for him to reject both parents and "escape" the situation by becoming "emotionally disturbed," "a problem child," or choose some form of destructive behavior, such as the kinds mentioned earlier in this report (Chapter I).

Tolerance of Differences

Avoiding judgements about the "other parent" or the "stepparent" is essential, but it is also helpful to focus the fact that things are done "differently" in different families, and to stay away from labels of "right and wrong," "good and bad," or "old and new." Pointing out that there is more than one way to fold towels or make lasagna, and that they "both work," gives a child a vehicle by which to "save face" in both houses. It is also a very simple and basic way to teach a child respect for individual differences within his two families which might later be expanded to tolerance and acceptance of cultural differences on a more global scale.

Encouraging open discussion of the issues involved in a remarriage, and expression of the related feelings will make things better for all family members. Most of all, no matter what the custodial circumstances, or the ages of the children may be, the children should be encouraged to continue in and maintain the relationships with both of their natural parents. According to Einstein and Albert (1986), "The best gift you can give your children is the permission to have a relationship with their other parent without your interference," (p. 86). Virginia Satir (1972) puts it this way,

> When all the adults around a child can be open and honest with one another and take responsibility for what they think and feel, the child benefits from their honesty and is freer to choose because he can be honest, too (p. 175).

CHAPTER V. PARENTING ISSUES

The preceding two chapters have dealt with two major areas in which stepfamilies are different from "normal," intact families: structural differences and issues of affect. This chapter examines another very important issue: parenting. Parenting stepchildren is complex for many reasons. The sheer number of "parents" each child has increases, there are no social norms recognized by the public-at-large and stepparent roles are largely undefined (Goetting, 1982, Prosen & Farmer, 1982), legal rights and financial responsibilities are blurred or multiplied (Messinger & Walker, 1981, Einstein & Albert, 1986), there is no common family history or family traditions, there is mobility of the children between two or more households, life cycle stage differences between stepparents and stepchildren may create conflicting needs. These are just a few of the reasons stepfamilies may have additional burdens in the already onerous task of parenting, in general. This chapter will examine some of the styles of parenting adopted by parents in stepfamilies, the issue of parenting young adolescents in newly-forming stepfamilies, the various ways parents in different households can parent their children, and guidelines for effective stepparenting.

Parenting Arrangements

When one or both parents in a divorced couple decide to remarry, their children are automatically plunged into a stepfamily situation. The children are suddenly faced with having one or two extra "parents," and possibly some extra "brothers and sisters." Depending upon the parenting arrangement which the divorced couple had during their single-parent phase, and depending upon their mutual willingness and ability to renegotiate parenting procedures upon the remarriage of one of the parents, one of the three following situations will most likely develop:

- one parent does all, or the vast majority of the parenting, seldom, if ever, consulting the other parent;
- a system of "parallel parenting" (Furstenberg, 1987, p. 57) develops, where each parent operates independently of the other when he/she has custody of the child, only occasionally consulting with the other parent, often parenting very differently from the other and sometimes being openly manipulative and hostile toward the other parent;
- all the parents and stepparents work cooperatively to form a "parenting coalition" (Visher & Visher, 1989, 1991), consulting with each other on a regular basis, making joint decisions for the benefit of the child and providing consistency and stability for the child in most areas, i.e., bedtimes, allowances, curfews, chores, values, supervision, etc.

Best Choice of Parenting Style

The Vishers (1989) subscribe to the last form of shared parenting and to it have applied the phrase "parenting coalition" as it regards stepfamilies. They describe this coalition as "a temporary alliance of discrete entities for the purpose of accomplishing a project. Thus coalition reflects the needed separation (boundaries) between the households and the limited task-oriented nature of the commitment to a specific task--cooperative contacts regarding the raising of the children" (p. 65). The Vishers (1989,1991) further state that the formation of a coalition promotes cooperation rather than competition, better meets the needs of parents and children, reduces the antagonism between the adults, relieves some of the stress of 24-hour parenting which single-parent families (and all families) face, reduces the children's fears of losing one of their parents and thus alleviates many of the loyalty conflicts which arise for children when their parents divorce and remarry.

According to Messinger and Walker (1981), throughout the whole cycle of separation/divorce/single-parenting/ remarriage, "co-parenting" (their version of the above "parenting coalition") is the most successful choice. Children do best when both parents share parenting and participate actively in their children's lives. They recommend "procedures and structural arrangements which enhance the continuity of the parenting of both parents during [all these difficult transitions]" (p. 437). They state that all children of estranged, separated, divorced [and remarried] parents need:

- to have the opportunity to love and be loved by both parents, in security
- to be able to enjoy parental love without tension, and without being made to feel guilty through the jealousy or demands of either or both of their parents
- to be able to enjoy both parents without seductive or hostile pressures by either parent, without questioning, belittling, smear or

recrimination by either parent, and without disturbing the normal rhythms of life

- to see their estranged parents behaving toward each other, if not with warmth and understanding, then at least with courtesy and consideration
- to know that both parents accept that visits are primarily the right of the child and not that of the parent (p. 430).

They further state that the parents in the above circumstances need:

- to feel secure in their children's love without competition and that seeing their children on a visitation basis only is not enough
- to be able to form new relationships that can include, in appropriate ways, the children from their [former] marriages (p. 431).

Virginia Satir (1972), in discussing the "blended family," echoes the above authors. She states that "children should be encouraged [by all their parents] to speak up if they are getting opposing messages and all the adults concerned should have periodic meetings to agree or disagree [on matters for the benefit of their children] (p. 174). She further states, "...it is important to remember that it is the adults who got remarried, not the children...[and that]...the parenting of both adults who remarry has to undergo drastic changes if they are to do a successful job" (pp. 178-179).

Parenting the Adolescent In a Stepfamily

Parenting an adolescent under "normal" circumstances in an intact family is, at least, challenging; and it demands growth and change for the adults involved if the task is to be carried out successfully. Parenting the adolescent, especially the young adolescent, in a newly-formed stepfamily may have some additional stress. Prosen & Farmer (1982) postulate that "adolescence may be even more chaotic in stepfamilies than in nuclear families" (p. 394). The most obvious stressor is that the adolescent is at the beginning of his "moving out of and away from the family" stage, while the newly-formed stepcouple is moving in the opposite direction. They are trying to meld themselves and their children into "one big happy family." Einstein & Albert (1986) contend that "remarriage studies have often overlooked the fact that most children who become stepchildren are at or near this turning point in their lives; when a teenager's individual development is out of sync with the stepfamily's stage of growing together, everyone is affected and crisis often erupts" (p. 120). According to the Vishers (1988), "[the adolescent] need for increased autonomy is clashing with the needs of the new couple who are in the 'nesting stage'" (p. 157). The family is attempting to establish a" sense of family cohesiveness" and the adolescent is at a "stage of development that requires a loosening of emotional ties with the family" (Visher & Visher, 1979, p. 176).In the case where both natural parents are remarried, separating from two stepfamily households is more difficult than separating from one, and certainly more difficult than separating from an intact family where the parents are more likely to be ready to "let go." As one teenager put it, "Two parents are too many; who wants any more?" (Visher & Visher, 1988, p. 156).

Caution should be exercised, however, not to blame all the problems of an adolescent on the fact that he is in a stepfamily, or all the problems of a stepfamily on the fact that there are adolescents present. Parents and stepparents need to remember that it is normal for teenagers to "move away" in all families, causing some understandable feelings of loss and disruption. Furthermore, if the adults will remember their own teenage years, they may be reassured that what they may perceive as rejection is merely normal adolescent development. Also, it may be helpful to remember that all stepfamilies will face some adjustments and conflicts in the early stages. The adults are then usually able to relax, lessen their perhaps unreasonable expectations of the adolescents and reduce the tension in the household. They may find that the teenagers will then be more open to relating with the adults on a one-to-one basis or on a limited basis in family activities (Visher & Visher, 1982). Using either the "teenager" or the "step" situation as a scapegoat for problems often avoids examining all the other issues which could be causing the family some distress.

The following is a brief description of adolescence, its characteristics and major changes, with the focus being on early adolescence. Included are reasons why some young adolescents and their parents and stepparents may clash. Later in this chapter some possible ways to avoid or resolve these conflicts through effective parenting and stepparenting will be discussed.

Adolescence: A Time of Change

Havighurst (1972) describes adolescence as a time of "physical and emotional maturing" during which "the principal lessons are emotional and social, not intellectual" (p. 43). According to G.Stanley Hall, a well-known child psychologist in the early part of the twentieth century, adolescence is a time of "storm and stress," (Conger, 1984, p. 11). On the other hand, some researchers cite studies and polls which present a much brighter picture: that most teenagers are happy. Petersen (1987), for example, stated that more than half of the teens she studied reported trouble-free years. Early adolescence, according to Lipsitz (1980), is the stage of development about which there is the least amount of information known. However, she writes that trends in the social sciences toward a "developmental life cycle" approach, coupled with reports that the years of early adolescence can be a troubled time, have recently sparked interest in this group. Indeed, the current "catchword" among educators, clinicians, researchers and politicians seems to be the "at risk" child. Much of the focus on the "at risk generation" seems to be aimed at the middle school age child (Lipsitz, 1980).

Major Areas of Change

The first is the "physical-sexual" area, dealing with all the bodily changes which occur during early adolescence. The second is the "mental-cognitive-psychological" area, which deals with the different kinds of thinking processes which adolescents acquire. Over the course of time, these monumental changes which are occurring to the adolescent simultaneously and sequentially, sometimes asymmetrically and conflictually, profoundly affect him emotionally and socially. As a result, he often demonstrates behavior which adults find "difficult," to say the least.

Physical-Sexual Changes

Conger (1984) has said that adolescence "begins in biology and ends in culture,"(p. 92). Early adolescence is the time when puberty usually becomes apparent. The most plainly visible and obvious signs of imminent and incipient adolescence are the changes which begin to occur in the physical bodies of a delightfully pleasant and rather homogeneous group: fourth, fifth and sixth graders. These late-elementary-school and early-middle-school children suddenly begin to shoot up in height, gain muscle size and strength, and, in the case of the girls, develop feminine curves. Puberty is not an "event," but a fairly standard, sequential process, allowing some for individual differences. Sexual maturation begins internally at a slightly earlier stage, however, it is the outward signs of these internal changes that society generally terms the onset of "puberty." These dramatic internal and external changes bring with them a concomitant interest in sexual matters and a compelling interest in sexual activity.

While this is all part of any teenager's normal sexual development, being in a stepfamily could pose some additional stress. Stepchildren may be attracted to their stepparents, stepparents may be attracted to their stepchildren, or the stepsiblings may be attracted to one another. While the same kinds of sexual feelings and attractions may happen in "normal," intact families, the absence of an actual blood relationship in stepfamilies weakens, or eliminates, the incest taboo. Any of these events could lead to unacceptable sexual behavior which could disrupt, or possibly destroy, the family and cause lasting emotional damage. At the very least, awareness of these feelings could cause confusion, fear and guilt to the persons involved. Stepfamily members might also react "by withdrawing or being openly hostile in an attempt to mask the feelings or control the unacceptable impulses" (Visher & Visher, 1979, p. 177).

Furthermore, in intact families children do not often have to face their own parents' sexuality. In a new stepfamily adolescents cannot escape the fact that their formerly-single parent is now "sleeping with someone" or that "some other woman/man is in my parent's bed." Teenage girls may compete with their stepmothers for their fathers' affections; teenage boys struggling with issues of male identity may resent the man who has "taken his father's place" (Visher & Visher, 1979, p. 196). The obviously sexual nature of the relationship of the newly-married couple may embarrass the teen who is just beginning to deal with his own sexual issues (Visher & Visher, 1979, McGoldrick & Carter, 1980, Kuyper, 1987).

Mental-Cognitive-Psychological Changes

While all the complex biological and sexual changes are taking place in the bodies of young adolescents, their minds are also undergoing major developments. The famous Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, termed these developments "formal operations," a shift in thinking from the "real to the possible" (Conger, 1984, p. 162). Unlike younger children, young adolescents become able to consider all the possible solutions to a particular problem. They are able to generate multiple hypotheses and to begin testing them out in a systematic manner. It has been observed that the older the adolescent, the more likely he is to be systematic in his approach, however, even the very young early adolescent can come up with many possible hypotheses (Santrock, 1983, p. 386).

Yet another manifestation of "formal operations" is the ability of the adolescent to take his own thoughts and think about them. "Guided by the irresistible, sometimes painful, self-awareness that stems from the rapid physical, physiological and psychological changes of this period, the adolescent boy, or girl, is likely to become more introspective and analytical" (Conger, 1984, p. 169). His newly-found thought processes allow such a luxury as never before. The adolescent can "think about his own and others' thinking". The following quote from a young adolescent illustrates this point:

> I found myself thinking about my future, and then I began to think about why I was thinking about my future, and then I began to think about why I was thinking about why I was thinking about my future (Conger, 1984, p. 169).

The introspective and serpentine nature of his ponderings will lead the adolescent into a stage which any adult will recognize as one of the hallmarks of adolescence: egocentrism. The egocentrism gives rise to what Elkind (1981) calls the "imaginary audience." Since the adolescent is so preoccupied with the "goings on" in his mind and body, and, since he fails to differentiate between "personal concerns and those of others" (Lipsitz, 1980, p. 18), he assumes everyone around is staring at, thinking about, talking about, and judging him all the time. A phenomenon related to the "imaginary audience" is that which Elkind (1981) terms the "personal fable" (p. 114). It is precisely because he believes all eyes are upon him that he begins to feel that he is "unique" and begins to construct a "personal fable."

One further development arising out of the ability to "think about thinking" is the adolescent's increasing capacity to infer how people of differing ages and backgrounds think and feel, and to begin, however haltingly, to understand and empathize with others:

> My assessment of your opinions and feelings is egocentric to the degree that I have unwittingly misattributed my own opinions and feelings to you (Conger, 1984, p. 167).

The "Put Down"

Another way in which the young adolescent manifests new cognitive skills is in the "elaborate art of the 'put down'" (Conger, 1984, p. 171), a hallmark of early adolescence. While serving to protect the delicate self-concept within, by means of 'putting down' everyone and everything within range, the 'put down' also exhibits the young adolescent's ability to think in abstractions, using metaphor and irony. Sometimes, a youngster who is very upset by the divorce and remarriage of his parents will use this kind of verbal barrage coupled with an apparent "I don't care" attitude to cover up his pain and confusion (Visher & Visher, 1979, p. 195). For the moment, a masterfully delivered, but not too subtle, "low blow" about Dad's grammar, about the stepparent's attire, about a teacher's mistake in class or about a classmate's low test score, assures the young adolescent that he is smarter, "cooler," and "on top of things."

Expanding Social Horizons

Since these young adolescents can "consider all the possibilities" and are so immeasurably self-conscious, they begin to compare their immediate surroundings to those of their friends' homes, or to, what they imagine might be, the "ideal" situation. Parents who previously may have been idealized may suddenly be found "wanting" (Elkind, 1974, p. 164). Moving beyond the home, adolescents compare their neighborhoods, schools and teachers, and, later on, religious institutions, governments and the "established order," in general, to what they visualize as, not only the ideal, but the very possible. The "status quo" may be found seriously "lacking" and may be the subject of adolescent criticism and attack (Elkind, 1974).

Up until early adolescence, the parents, not the peer group, have had the child's strongest allegiance. At this time, sometimes rather abruptly, young adolescents begin to regard the peer group as having all "the answers," "being cool, fun and all-important." Parents, are relegated to the mental "back burner," are considered "old-fashioned, out-of date, boring and embarrassing." For some parents, the sudden change in their child is difficult to accept Once again, it is important to remember that these developments are normal and do not necessarily reflect the sudden addition of a stepparent at this time.

Another important development is that the adolescent is beginning to form a "self." Up until this time, the level of his self-esteem, and his identity as a member of a particular family, neighborhood, ethnic group, etc., have been forming. In early adolescence an important dimension is added: a "self" separate from family and other related groups. Generally beginning with the adolescent's choosing his own peer group and continuing with new choices in music, clothing, attitudes and opinions, the young adolescent begins to carve out a "self" which differentiates him from his parents and other family members.

Later on, if development continues in a healthy manner, he will separate once again, this time from the "group," and become a truly autonomous "individual." Family, mentors, friends, and society will always continue to influence the individual, but a healthy person is able to accept feedback from the external world and still make independent decisions about his life. This process constantly evolves and unfolds throughout his lifetime. An important piece of it takes place in early adolescence (Conger, 1982). It is definitely a time of going back-and-forth: moving into new relationships and roles, moving toward adulthood, and, yet, needing and wanting the comfort and security and limits offered to them by caring and responsible parents.

Divided Loyalty Conflicts in Adolescents

One researcher found that the area of "divided loyalties" was the one which caused most stress for adolescents in stepfamilies (Lutz, 1983, p. 371). "The young person can easily feel guilty about giving affection to a new parent. At the same time, this affection acknowledges there is no hope of the biological parents reuniting. Often, an adolescent will shout in anger and pain, "I want my REAL Mom/Dad!" (Kuyper, 1987, p. 131). The enhanced cognitive capacities of the adolescent and the ability to compare their "lot" with those of others give adolescent stepchildren ample cannon fodder for their angry salvos against parents and stepparents alike. They can complain to each that it is "better at the other house," that "I'm going to live with Mom/Dad!" or that "You (adults) don't care and can't possibly understand me!" They may play on the guilt or frustration of each set of parents, moving back-and-forth from Mom's house to Dad's house, depending upon where it suits their whim. Parents may be trying to be "reasonable' and "understanding," but after a while may feel manipulated. According to McGoldrick & Carter (1980), "The adolescent [has] a tendency to resolve divided loyalties by taking sides or actively playing one side against the other" (p. 277).

In cases like these, a strong "parenting coalition" (see above), the adults could unite, set limits for the adolescent and support one another.

Also, some young adolescents may feel guilty about preferring the company of their peer group over that of their parents and new stepparents. In order to soothe that guilt, they will begin to criticize the adults' grammar, accent, eating habits, clothes, hair styles, choice of neighborhoods, occupation, religious beliefs, or anything else that seems to be a viable target. The understandably immediate and negative reaction from the parents and stepparents then (from the adolescent point of view) justifies the adolescents' preference for the company of their friends (Elkind, 1981).

This parental criticism may also stem from the fact that adolescents have a newfound ability to think in past-present-future perspective. Coupling this ability with the ability to come up with a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations (Elkind, 1974), they may then begin to find fault with all the "real or imagined slights parents committed during childhood that were suppressed or repressed, but not forgotten," (Elkind, 1981, p. 111). This ability to imagine "how it should have been" also allows them to imagine "how it could or should or might become" (Conger, 1984, p. 167). Young adolescents are able to think about life in the future, five to ten years in the future, and plan for the future.

Major Developmental Tasks

Havighurst (1972) describes the "developmental tasks" of adolescence, "the tasks the individual must learn...if he is to be judged and to judge himself to be a reasonably happy and successful person...those things that constitute healthy and satisfactory growth in our society," (p. 2). There are several such tasks described by Havighurst and others. The two tasks most often mentioned are discussed below.

Identity Development

Perhaps no other single task of adolescence is as significant or as all-encompassing as that of achieving an identity, a sense of oneself. Erik Erikson (1985) saw it as the single developmental task of adolescence, without the successful completion of which the succeeding tasks of life could not be fully accomplished. According to Conger (1984), successful identity formation demands that the adolescent:

- see himself as a distinct, unique, individual, as separate from others
- have a feeling of self-consistency, of wholeness, of unity within himself
- have a sense of continuity of the self over time
- have a sense of psycho-social reciprocity, a consistency between that which he conceives himself to be and that which he perceives others to see in him and expect of him (pp. 75-76).

Elkind (1974) speaks to the above in saying, "the major task of [the adolescent] is the establishment of a stable and resilient ego identity...to bring all the knowledge about himself together and to arrange it into some meaningful, workable whole that he can call himself and with which he can live reasonably well" (pp. 152-153).

Santrock (1983) reports that Elkind, in his study with Bowen (1980), found adolescents had two facets within their identities which they were busily sorting out during the period of early adolescence. One facet is the "transient self," that part of the self which can vary over time, i.e., dressing appropriately, getting a bad haircut, and the other facet is the "abiding self," that part which is relatively consistent over time, i.e., levels of intelligence, extroversion vs. introversion (pp. 385-386). Adolescents in stepfamilies may suddenly find themselves thrust into extra "transient selves" as their parents have moved through the stages of separation/divorce/single-parent/remarriage. They may have gone from "children," to having been "little adults" for a while in their single-parent families, back to being "children" again upon the remarriage of one of their parents.

Another distinction which adolescents find themselves subject to is that of the "ideal" self versus the "real" self. The "ideal" self is that which he would like to become, while the "real" self is that which he truly is. The "ideal" plays a big part in the daily choices which the young adolescent makes in all areas of his life, i.e., personal hygiene, companions, behavior, application to schoolwork, relationships with family, etc.

It is perhaps most true of the young adolescent that, in his quest for an "abiding" and "ideal" self, he will have many "transient selves," both of the "ideal" and "real" variety, before finally settling on an "abiding" and "real" self in later adolescence and young adulthood. In their search for this "abiding" and "real" self which will be their permanent identity, teenagers in stepfamilies frequently wish to live with the biological parent with whom they have not been living. This will often come into conflict with the wishes of the new stepfamily couple who are trying to consolidate their family unit (Visher & Visher, 1988, p. 156).

Autonomy Development

Closely and inextricably related to the formation of the adolescent's identity is his movement toward autonomy. Lipsitz (1980) has said, "adolescents must stridently assert their autonomy in order to separate their identity from that of their families....young adolescents [begin] to form peer orientations with regard to companionship, but continue to turn to parents for models and advice" (p. 14).

McGoldrick & Carter (1980) state, "The adolescent resents major shifts in his or her customary family role and frequently resists overtly learning new roles or engaging in new family relationships" (p. 277). According to Elkind (1974), the young adolescent "tends to participate less in family activities than he did as a younger child," a trend which continues to become more evident as adolescence proceeds (p. 184). Often, a young adolescent will express either a desire to be "out with friends," seeking the sustaining relationships of their peers, or, they will prefer to be "home alone," rather than accompany parents and younger siblings on an outing. "[Adolescents] may withdraw from both natural parents and not wish to be part of many of the 'family' activities" (Visher & Visher, 1979, p. 264).

Furthermore, when all the family is at home, the young adolescent will prefer to remove himself "to my room" where he will stay for hours on end much to the puzzlement and concern of parents. "It is important to remember that [the young adolescent's] reclusiveness is a constructive and necessary period of inner consolidation that requires a certain freedom from external intrusions" (Elkind, 1974, p. 184). Because of this need to be by themselves, adolescent stepchildren may feel an "invasion of [personal] space" because of the remarriage (Kuyper, 1987, p. 130). An extra adult, extra furnishings, extra siblings, or a move to another house, may deprive the young adolescent of needed space and privacy. He may have to share a room with another child, have less room on the couch, or simply have reduced T.V. or computer "time."

Choosing their own friends, their own peer "group," is another way in which young adolescents express their growing need for autonomy. In earlier years, parents were more able to monitor their children's friendships. With the move into middle school, the merging of several elementary schools provides a more diverse population from which the young adolescent can choose (Elkind, 1974). In this area, too, young adolescents seem to have a very changeable nature, fiercely attaching themselves to one friend or group for a while, changing to another, withdrawing from friendships, relating more (for a while) to adults, both teachers and parents, only to begin the cycle anew.

Changeable Nature of Adolescent

The young adolescent, because of the very monumental changes going on in his body and mind, behaves in a very "flighty" manner. He may see many possible solutions, but does not have the background or experience upon which to base consistently rational and productive choices. Because of this the young adolescent often appears to be "hopelessly dependent, fickle and indecisive" (Elkind, 1974, p. 179).

While all this may perhaps appear to parents as somewhat whimsical, arbitrary, and extremely unnecessary, the young adolescent is going through the process of separating from family, identifying with and learning from others, rejoining family, moving out again, trying out more new experiences and ideas, and returning "home" again. It is a time reminiscent of the toddler stage, when the child would wander away from a parent for a few minutes to explore and investigate a new delight, return to reaffirm the safety and proximity of the parent, and sally forth again to find new adventures. In the young adolescent, a similar process is ongoing, however, he is less likely than his toddler counterpart to reassure his parents with happy smiles upon returning "home," and more likely to venture further away more often. (Clarke, 1978).

Difficult Separation Process in Stepfamilies

"Teenagers do not usually welcome the birth of a stepfamily," write the Vishers (1988), as they have lived out their childhoods first in an intact family, then in two "half families," and have reached a point of moving out into their peer group in search of "who they are" (p. 155). They profess to being ready to "move out on their own" and "make their own decisions." Understandably, their parents have a great deal of ambivalence as they contemplate the inevitable. In spite of all the bravado, these young people, as well, generally experience some ambivalence regarding their emerging autonomy. Often, many adults do not complete the separation process from their own parents until they see their children beginning to separate from them.

Parents naturally want their children to grow up, achieve success in academic, social, and other areas, partly because they know it is an inevitable fact of the passage of time; at the same time, the do not want to lose the "darling little boy or girl" of yesteryear. Parents know that their children must experience difficulties, challenges and pain in the struggle toward adulthood, however, parents also instinctively are pulled to protect their young from those very things.

Separation and Discipline in the Stepfamily

This process of "push-pull" is quite universal and naturally takes place from the moment a child is born and continues in many cases until he or she is well "out of the house" many years beyond that time. A large part of this "push-pull" involves the area of discipline. McGoldrick & Carter (1980) see "discipline" and the "amount and kind" of disciplinary power wielded by the stepparent as one of the five leading areas of conflict in a stepfamily. According to Lutz (1983), the "second highest cause of stress in stepfamilies with adolescents is discipline." She says, "[discipline] may be particularly stressful for many adolescents because adolescence is a time for testing and rebelling. [They] do not respond positively to rules, especially from an 'outsider' (stepparent). Teenagers may have more vivid memories of 'how it was' before and may have had more responsibility and independence in the single-parent family" (p. 371). Although this back-and-forth process has been ongoing since the child's birth, it peaks during adolescence because of a number of factors:

- Children are often "gone" from the home, not only during school hours, but frequently during evenings and weekends.

- Children begin to "think, reason, and talk like adults," using 'adult' vocabulary, discussing 'adult' subjects, and making independent decisions in these areas, i.e., sexuality, dating, career choices, automobile use, and money.
- Children gain adult size and appearance with the onset puberty and rapid physical growth.
- Both parents and children are aware of the rapidly approaching time for the youth's departure "into the world," i.e., college, job, marriage, and the importance of "using well the time that is left," be it for "having fun," or "cramming in all the extra math and science possible," or whatever appears important to the individual concerned.

According to the Vishers (1988), discipline cannot be enforced without the consent of the "disciplinee" (p. 213). They recommend that stepparents develop a friendship with a stepchild first, before ever trying to discipline him. Before that time, the natural parent should handle all the discipline.

Custodial vs. Non-custodial Parents

Regardless of whether parents are custodial or non-custodial, the most important factor in their parenting is that they both be as actively involved in their children's lives as possible. Since "children often see themselves as a composite of both their biological mother and father" (Lutz, 1983, p. 371), having a "continuing and positive relationship with both parents is necessary for the child's psychosocial development and emotional stability (Messinger & Walker, 1981, p. 432). Children tend to internalize criticism of one parent by the other. It is difficult for them to feel good about themselves if they feel badly about one of their natural parents. It essential that both parents refrain from open conflict toward and disparaging remarks about each other in front of the child.

Non-custodial Parent

The non-custodial parent has his own set of challenges to meet in order to maintain a productive and healthy relationship with his children. He needs to reassure the children, especially at the times of transition (i.e., separation, divorce, remarriage), that he loves them, that their relationship will continue although their contact may take a different form. The children need to be told as much as possible what the new arrangements will be. They need to know how often, for how long, where, when, and how the contact will take place. They need to see his new living space, meet the new, or prospective, stepparent, and see for themselves how and where they will "fit in." While all these measures are tedious and time-consuming, and may initially cause more upset than desirable, they will eventually lead the children to have more trust in the non-custodial parent and a sense of more control over their lives.

Another challenge faced by the non-custodial parent is how to parent as "normally" as possible given that the children generally visit for brief periods (overnight or on weekends) or for a few weeks in the summer. The non-custodial parent may be tempted to become a "Disneyland Dad" because of guilt, especially if the divorce (and subsequent remarriage) was initiated by him. Whether it be trips to Sea World, the mountains or the nearest shopping mall, this parent can fall into the pattern of providing entertainment and goodies for his children in an attempt to assuage his guilt and "make up" to his children for the pain they have suffered (Visher & Visher, 1979, pp. 98-102). Both the parent and the children express a lack of satisfaction and "realness" when the visitation times are only spent attending movies, going to the zoo, eating out at "fast food" restaurants and excluding contact with other persons with whom the child normally interacts on a daily basis.

Some parents have experimented with non-traditional methods of child-sharing. Some have "taken turns occupying the family household where the children reside." Others have "included many of the child's belongings in each household, enabling the child to move freely back and forth," (Messinger and Walker, 1981, p. 434). As much as possible, the non-custodial parent should involve himself in routine activities, keep a substantial amount of the child's possessions in his home, provide a "space" in his home that is exclusively the child's, have consistent rules, invite the child's friends to participate in activities at his house, and attend school and neighborhood events which involve his child. Such things as taking a teenager to the orthodontist, expecting the young adolescent to "take out the trash," and "cut the grass," coaching his child's softball team, or communicating regularly with the child's teacher about homework, all help the parent remain significantly involved in his child's life and help the child feel connected to his parent in a more "normal" way. Messinger & Walker (1981) also report that some parents have "taken up residences close to each other to allow the children to more easily spend an equal amount of time with each parent and feel more comfortable relating to each parent in ordinary kinds of ways" (p. 434).

Custodial Parent

The custodial parent, no less than the non-custodial, also has an unique set of challenges in order to provide the most beneficial environment for her children that she can. "There is a tendency for the single custodial parent and family to constitute a new form of nuclear family, closing its boundaries around a reinforced set of loyalties between custodial parent and children," state Messinger & Walker (1981). This arrangement may be comforting to the parent and children, but it "risks partial exclusion of the other parent from the children's affections and loyalty." Furthermore, it hampers or precludes the eventual entry of another marital partner into this tight family unit.

While some shifting of responsibilities onto the older, or oldest, child in a single-parent family is perhaps inevitable, the parent should refrain from making any child "the man of the house" or "Daddy's girl (friend)." Making a child the confidant of the single parent, expecting a major take-over in financial or housekeeping responsibilities, or similarly expecting a child to "side" with her against the non-custodial parent are tempting but destructive modes of behavior. They both rob a child of his right to be a "kid." and, simultaneously, thrust him into a heady position of power which he is unable, if not unwilling, to handle. Messinger & Walker (1981) further state, "clearly, the more interaction between the separated nonresident parent and the children, and the closer that parent's involvement in the ongoing life of the children, the easier it should be to prevent the formation of a closed, single-parent system" (p. 433).

When a new stepparent is introduced, the biological parent needs to "step back, relax these bonds and allow the children and the stepparent to work out their relationship naturally," (Einstein & Albert, 1986, p. 61). It is helpful if the biologic parent lets the stepparent know "just what role she expects him to play in the new family;" [and] "it is important for the biologic parent to support and listen to the new stepparent, understanding that the stepparent's role is not a easy one" (p. 62). According to Bohannan (1985), "in successful stepfamilies, the natural parent is the all-important pivot...the husband-wife league must be absolutely tight, though not at the expense of weakening parent-child links or of threatening the league of the divorced parents in rearing their children" (p. 224). Another study reports, "for the natural parent, the problem is often one of maintaining an existing relationship with children and previous family members (e.g.,grandparents), while building and strengthening the new marital bond" (Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1983, p. 371).

Guidelines For Effective Stepparenting

As a result of reviewing the literature on stepfamilies and adolescence, drawing upon the suggestions of Turnbull and Turnbull (1983) and Einstein and Albert (1986), specifically, and others, in general, this author suggests, that stepparents (and "regular" parents in stepfamilies) might find the following guidelines helpful in dealing with young adolescents in their stepfamilies. These suggested guidelines seemed to fall naturally into four areas: relationships, attitudes, behavior, and affect.

Relationships

Being aware of appropriate and healthy relationship boundaries, setting limits and maintaining those boundaries, and periodically reviewing relationships for needed changes facilitates smooth and safe interactions.

Role of Stepparent with Stepchildren

-Stepparents can play one or more roles in stepchildren's lives: "special" friend, confidant, another parent figure, another adult, mentor or role model.

-Stepparents should strive for a strong sense of personal identity, defining their place in the family as different from either of the stepchild's natural parents.

-Stepparents (and natural parents) should be "parents" and not "buddies." Adolescents, especially, will go to their peers for "buddies." They need adults to be role models.

-Stepparents should allow stepchildren to decide what to call them; they should never force the youngster to call the stepparent, "Mom" or "Dad."

-Stepparents should never attempt to replace the natural parent, whether he is living or dead.

- Stepparents should avoid trying to fit a preconceived role, but try to be kind, intelligent and a good sport.

- The stepfamily couple should discuss and agree upon what role the step-parent will take.

Relationship of Stepcouple with "Other" Parent

- The stepfamily couple should allow the young person to have as full and healthy a relationship as he chooses with the other parent, giving him an ever-increasing voice in the decisions about visitations and activities.
- The stepfamily couple should avoid arguments, disparaging remarks to, or about, the "other" parent in front of the child.
- The stepfamily couple should never use the child as a "spy," "messenger," or a "pawn" between households.
- The stepfamily couple should resolve any "unfinished business" with former spouse, or spouses, in appropriate ways, i.e., talking with friends, counselors, in support groups, and strive to keep the children "out of the crossfire."
- The stepfamily couple should attempt to form "parenting coalitions" with the "other" parents of their children so that all significant adults in the children's lives will be working in unison for their benefit.

Relationship within the Stepfamily Marital Bond

- The stepfamily couple should maintain the primacy of their new marital relationship. Spending too much time working on the stepparent role can lead to neglect of the primary adult relationship.

Attitudes

Stepparents (and natural parents) can avoid a lot of conflict and painful feelings if they will enter into a stepfamily with realistic and healthy attitudes. Creating false expectations sets up stepfamily members for anger and disappointment.

- Stepparents should avoid expecting "instant love;" it takes time to create loving relationships.
- Stepparents should avoid taking all the responsibility for problems; they should believe in the children's abilities and allow them to be responsible for themselves.
- Stepparents should be open to change.
- Stepparents should expect ambivalence; it is normal.
- Stepparents should be patient; it takes time to work through problems.
- Stepparents should show an interest in, ask questions about, stepchildren's hobbies, favorite movies, books and music. Whenever possible, stepparents should listen when the child wants to talk.
- Stepparents should be available for, and offer to help, with homework; give it when asked, never force the issue.
- Stepparents should be aware that the young adolescent is "moving away" and "trying his wings." Allow the distancing to take place, realizing that it is normal and not necessarily a reflection of the current stepfamily situation.

- Stepparents should be aware and tolerant of the changeable nature of the young adolescent: delightful one day, moody and tearful the next; responsible and helpful one week, an irresponsible "slob" the next; wanting to stay home and talk with parents one night, to go out with friends for the next three nights in a row.
- Stepparents should make every effort to treat each child as an individual, affirming his strengths, accepting his uniqueness, celebrating his special gifts, empowering him for success.

Behavior

There are many proactive ways to deal with stepchildren which may facilitate some positive results. The stepfamily couple should discuss in advance and plan these activities.

- Stepfamilies should provide some "neutral" territory so that each family member can feel that he has a special place he can call his own.
- Stepfamilies should allow young persons, especially adolescents, to have a "space" and possessions of their own in both households, making certain that they have privacy and time alone and that their things are not invaded by others in the family.
- Stepfamilies should welcome stepchildren's friends into their home, including having pizza parties, slumber parties and taking kids to a movie or the local mall.
- Stepparents should set firm, consistent limits on young person's behavior. The stepfamily couple should work out rules ahead of time and

support each other in enforcing rules and following through with consequences, if needed.

- In the beginning, it is most effective in stepfamilies if the natural parents discipline their own children.
- Both natural parents and stepparents should, whenever possible, attend:
    - School-related sporting events, competitions, plays, band concerts, school carnivals,
    - Extra-curricular events, such as dance or gymnastics recitals, Little League games, Scouting events, and swim meets,
    - School "Open Houses" or "Back-to-School" nights; school conferences with teachers or other school personnel,
    - PTA meetings, Parent's Nights at church youth groups, and other parent organizations.
- Stepparents should network with the parents of their stepchildren's friends, never being afraid to call and check on plans relayed by the youngster. He may resist the "interference" at the time, claiming he is embarrassed and his social life is ruined, but some serious mischief could be prevented and a caring message is undeniably sent to the children.
- Stepparents, especially, should look for ways to "do things" with stepchildren, whether it be read the Sunday comics, clean out the garage, fix an engine, shop for clothes, cook a meal, look for a special present for the "other" parent or plan summer activities.

- Stepparents and natural parents should celebrate with their children, big events like birthdays and smaller occasions like getting a good report card.

Affect

The guidelines suggested above in the areas of relationships, attitudes and behavior will provide many fertile opportunities for feelings to surface. Creating a climate of acceptance and safety, warmth and consistency, allows feelings to be expressed and dealt with in a healthy and timely manner. In general, stepparents and natural parents should be empathetic, non-judgmental and non-defensive. Furthermore, the adults in a stepfamily should allow an outlet for the children's feelings for the natural parents. Children need to express these feelings, be they loving or angry, excited or sad. Virginia Satir (1976) stated it the best:

> I want to love you without clutching,
> appreciate you without judging,
> join you without invading,
> invite you without demanding,
> leave you without guilt,
> criticize you
> without blaming,
> and help you without insulting.
> If I can have the same from you
> then we can truly meet and
> enrich each other.

CHAPTER VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNSELORS

The stated purpose of this report was to examine the issues related to and provide the answers for the following questions: What is the nature of the stepfamily phenomenon? How many adults and children are involved? How did it all come about? Are stepfamilies treated like "normal" intact families, their special characteristics and differences unacknowledged or unknown? What are the characteristics of "normal," intact families, and what are the major issues which differentiate stepfamilies from "normal," intact families? What are the special need and tasks of early adolescence? How might they be manifested and promoted in "normal" intact families? How might they clash with the needs and tasks of newly-forming stepfamiles? How might a middle school counselor best intervene to serve the needs of stepchildren, stepparents and school staff members to whom she is responsible?

Nine-Element Approach to Intervention

All but the last of these questions has been addressed. This final chapter will outline and describe a nine-element approach for possible interventions by the school counselor at the middle school level.

Why nine elements? There seem to be three target groups of persons, each with somewhat similar, yet very different, needs. First, there are the middle school children, ages 11-14, whose parents have chosen to remarry and, by doing so, place them in a "stepfamily." Second, there are the school staff members, the administrators, the office personnel and the teachers, who interact with these students on a daily basis, nine months a year. Third, there are the parents, who with no "malice of forethought" chose to create and bring their children into a family form so complex it has been said that, "the stepfamily tree constitutes a 'family forest'" (Medler, et al., 1987, p. 51).

Furthermore, there seem to be three logical ways to approach intervention. There is, first of all, the cognitive approach. People must be educated, they must understand concepts, ideas and facts, in order for healthy change to take place. Knowledge alone is not sufficient, but some understanding is necessary for the other steps to proceed. Secondly, when people undergo great changes, as they do in going through the stages of the separation/ divorce/single-parenting/remarriage cycle, many powerful feelings are stirred up and need resolution. This leads to the second intervention approach, the affective area.

Finally, great understanding of the facts surrounding a problem and many hours spent "processing" feelings are but two legs on a three-legged stool. The third leg, the action-oriented, "hands on," behaviors, is necessary to complete the healing loop and bring about the desired change. Integrating, in matrix form, the three groups of people who might require intervention together with the three methods of approaching intervention, yields the nine elements as shown on Figure 6-1.

The following is a discussion of each of the nine elements, describing possible ways to carry out each of the approaches with each targeted audience. The topics and tools are merely recommendations meant to suggest a possible framework for working with stepfamilies at the middle school level. The reference material is in the appendices.

Figure 6-1

Stepfamilies With Adolescents: An Intervention Matrix Model For Middle School Counselors

	Cognitive Area EDUCATION	Affective Area SUPPORT	Behavioral Area GUIDANCE
KIDS	Individuals Classroom Groups	Individuals "One Step At A Time" Groups	Individual/Group Counseling Classrom Materials "Step Up To Success"
SCHOOL STAFF	In-Service: Administrators Teachers Individuals Office Staff	Support, Facilitate Parent/Teacher Conferences	Changes In Forms, Procedures, Policies
PARENTS	"Watch That Middle Step" Lectures Parenting Programs and Clases	Individuals "One Step At A Time" Group	Materials, Referral "Step Up To Success: Tools For Progress"

Use of Appendices

The appendices to this report have material to be used in these interventions. In the cognitive area, possible educational topics to be covered are listed. In the affective area, points to be stressed relative to feelings are listed. In the behavioral area, a list of tools to help facilitate the process is given. Depending upon the targeted group, the setting and chosen method of intervention being used, and the goal of the intervention, the school counselor could "pick and choose" from these lists or select from other similar materials and design a program to fit the unique needs of her school.

Working with Kids

Cognitive Area

Working in a school setting in the cognitive area with middle school children seems to be a very natural thing to do. Three likely ways to bring this about seem obvious. The first would be to present selected topics in individual classrooms at the invitation of the teacher to suit her particular structure. The topics related to stepfamilies that would seem to be of most interest to middle school children would be in the areas of early adolescent development, stress, and stepfamily issues, in that order. Other ways to cognitively intervene would take place in the counseling office. A counselor will have many occasions to educate an individual student regarding the many topics relevant to stepfamilies, if appropriate, in the course of a normal counseling session. Working with student support groups provides the third likely outlet for education in these areas. Although the subject of a stepfamily situation could come up in any group discussion, it would be most likely and appropriate in a group on stepfamily issues called "One Step At A Time." Other groups which might benefit from this information are student support groups dealing with the topics of divorce, family conflict, stress and loss.

Affective Area

Working with middle school students in the affective area is most appropriately done in individual sessions or in student support groups. Whether working with one individual, several students in a "One Step At A Time" support group, or several in another type of group, the dynamics are basically the same.

The counselor needs to provide a "safe" environment in which a student, or students, can share painful, or joyful, feelings related to stepfamily life. Being accepting and supportive, sensitive to issues of confidentiality, encouraging positive change, and continuously validating the worth of individuals, the middle school counselor can help students weather some very difficult passages of family life.

Behavioral Area

Working with kids in the behavioral area, the sky is virtually the limit. There are dozens of techniques and tools, to help individuals grasp ideas, "relate" to discussions, "work through" feelings, and begin to make some positive changes in their lives. These tools can be used with a whole classroom, with an individual student, or with student support groups. One that is very useful with young adolescents is to use bits of dialogue from movies or TV, or scenarios from books with which they are familiar, and to discuss how these fictional families differ, or are similar, to their own stepfamilies. Teaching communication skills, such as "I" messages, and giving them an assignment to go and try out these new skills on family members or friends is a powerful way to work with students. Having them draw pictures of their stepfamilies and discuss them comparing and contrasting their families with those of other students, having them share personal experiences of stepfamily life and be supportive of one another's experiences are all valid ways to work with students in stepfamilies.

Working with School Personnel

Cognitive Area

In working with school personnel, the emphasis will be different than working with middle school students. With school personnel the focus will be one of education and guidance, with a lesser amount of "support" involved. In the area of education, a school counselor can shed much light on the issues of stepfamilies, in particular. Everyone from the principal on down could benefit from some "in-service" in that area. Administrators, teachers and office staff need to know about the structural differences in stepfamilies, the level of complexity in these families, the stressors on stepfamilies, especially for those stepfamilies with adolescents. The laws regarding child custody, access to school records, and parent and student rights need to be periodically reviewed and presented. Adults who deal with stepchildren on campuses need to be aware of, and monitor, their use of casual language which could be prejudicial, embarrassing or painful to stepchildren. Such terms as "a broken home," "a failed marriage," or a careless open discussion in the office or lounge of a child's family situation could lead to confidentiality "leaks" or potential law suits. These adults also need to examine their biases regarding children of divorced parents, or children in stepfamilies, versus children in "normal," intact families.

Affective Area

The counselor can offer support to school personnel, especially teachers, when children in stepfamilies need parent/teacher conferences. She can facilitate such a conference, or simply be present in a supportive way, helping parents and teachers clarify the goals for the conference. She can also be available should the parents (or the teachers) need to "talk through" the results of the conference or she can be helpful in formulating a "game plan" to assist the student for whom the conference was held.

Behavioral Area

In the area of behavioral change, the school counselor can offer guidance regarding changes which should be made in policies, procedures and forms. Registration materials often have forms which are awkward and difficult to fill out if a child is not in a "normal," intact family. Changes in these forms will help the school get a more accurate picture of just who their children "really are," and "whom they live with." Emergency cards and health forms should reflect the names of the natural parents, the stepparents, and any other authorized adults, who could be responsible for the child if he were to need emergency care. Procedures to facilitate and ensure that school information is available to and sent to both natural parents should be initiated and periodically reviewed and updated. Such things as report cards, progress reports, invitations to special programs, general information regarding upcoming events, if received by both parents, could significantly improve the parent interest and attendance. This could ultimately be of great benefit to the child concerned and to the relationship he has with each of his parents. To some degree, the school also stands to gain. Increased parent participation in school activities results in increased communication between parent and school, increased parent volunteerism, and, possibly, increased general community support for the school, both emotionally and financially.

Teacher and office personnel sensitivity to such things as name "last name" differences between parents and children, children who "ferry back and forth" with great regularity between two homes, often forgetting homework at the "wrong" house, could make things a lot smoother for the child who may have trouble remembering, or finding time, to do homework at all. Raising the staff and faculty awareness to make room for "extra relatives" at school functions, to remember that a student may have two, or more, "mothers" (or "fathers") when Mother's Day cards are being made, and to have more materials in the library about stepfamilies for students to read, are but some of the ways the school counselor can influence schools to become more "stepfamily-friendly."

Working with Parents/Stepparents

Cognitive Area

Parent and stepparents are the third, and very important, group of people for whom the school counselor can provide some special services. In the cognitive area, parents can be educated on a wide variety of subjects, especially stepfamily issues. Furthermore, characteristics of "normal" intact and healthy families, adolescent development and stress are also very productive and valuable topics for parent education. Two of the ways parents come to school for information are to attend "one time" evening informational lectures, or to attend a daytime or evening parenting class and support group. A suggestion for a "one-time" lecture would be, "Watch That Middle Step!" a program which discusses adolescent development, focusing on the middle-school-age child, and stepfamily integration. The second type of program, the parenting class and support group, can take any format the counselor chooses, but it makes good sense to use one of the many good parenting programs available, such as Dinkmeyer's (1976) Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP), or Stephen Glenn's (1987) Developing Capable People. The general information on families and adolescents contained in the above (and similar) programs is good. The information on stepfamilies can be added in by the counselor from any one of several good books on stepfamilies. There are also some programs specifically geared to stepfamilies. One such program is Einstein and Albert's (1986) Strengthening Your Stepfamily.

Affective Area

Once these parenting groups have formed around a class, or after a particular program, they will begin to coalesce as a group and may want to continue meeting after the class ends. These "One Step At A Time" groups for adult members of stepfamilies, like their adolescent counterparts, can be very supportive and therapeutic. In addition to learning that "all feelings are Okay" and that it is important to express them in appropriate ways, in these parent support groups, they can learn from one another by sharing their stories, their sorrows and their joys. These parents and stepparents will feel more "normal" after having experienced a stepparent support group and will have their "coupleness" strengthened and validated. Coming out of isolation, linking up with other stepparents, merely networking with other parents, for some individuals may be the first time they have ever broken the "no talk" rule and discussed a "problem" outside of their families. While some may be scared by this vulnerability and leave, never to return to "any of that counselor stuff," others may be encouraged to seek private counseling for other issues, an outcome that could ultimately mean greater emotional health for their stepfamilies.

Another way counselors can be supportive to stepparents or parents in the affective area is merely by being available to help individuals "work through" feelings, by being a resource person for further help, and by working with them on a "one-on-one" basis throughout the whole cycle of separation/divorce/single-parenting/remarriage, a process which might well take several years.

Behavioral Area

In the behavioral area, school counselors can provide a whole repertoire of "things to do," tools to help parents and stepparents to work through their feelings and understand themselves and their stepfamilies better. These could be called "Step Up to Success: Tools for Progress." They include a "grab bag" of problem-solving strategies, conflict-resolution techniques, writing assignments, role-playing techniques, communication skills, and many different ways to visually represent the families, for example, through collages or genograms. These tools could be used as activities for classes, topics for group discussion, explained to individual parents in a counseling session or even over the telephone. Use of these tools, and sharing the results with other stepparents in "One Step At A Time " groups, would enable the stepfamily members to begin to appreciate the complexity of their undertaking, to better accept their stepfamily members, and to "move on" with the stepfamily integration process. Being a source of reference materials, referrals to other resources, these are other ways the school counselor can be helpful.

APPENDIX I EDUCATIONAL/COGNITIVE AREA

The following are suggested as topics for informational lectures for any of the targeted groups.

A. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALTHY FAMILY FUNCTIONING

There are ten Characteristics of Healthy Family Functioning which are repeatedly emphasized by theoreticians, clinicians and researchers.

1. Identity Processes

A healthy family is one which:

- allows and encourages the autonomy of its members,
- respects individual differences,
- expects individual "ownership" of differences,
- maintains integrity of family group by means of permeable boundaries,
- provides environment for genuine intimacy,
- allows members to "leave."

2. Ability to Change

A healthy family is one which:

- adapts to change in a flexible manner,
- expects stress from internal developmental pressure,
- expects stress from external social pressure,
- accepts these stressors as normal, and changes,
- changes maintain stability of family life,
- admits to problems and seeks appropriate help.

3. Communication Skills

A healthy family is one that:

- uses good communication skills, both clarity of perception and communication
- allows, encourages, open communication; any and all subjects are acceptable
- communicates with simple, real, straight, whole, true and congruent messages
- allows, encourages, the "freedom to comment on communication"
- makes loving and caring integral to its communication
- consciously makes time for healthy communication

4. Structure of Roles

A healthy family is one which:

- has clear boundaries between the parental and the child subsystems
- has a clear hierarchy of power
- has clear and flexible allocation and accountability of roles
- has a healthy, egalitarian parental coalition.

5. Affective Tone

A healthy family is one which:

- generally has a genuinely caring, empathetic and loving tone
- has high levels of energy, creativity and initiative
- uses lots of wit, humor and playfulness
- allows and encourages the appropriate expression of all feelings
- affirms, supports and generally builds up its members.

6. Range and Level of Competence

A healthy family is one which:

- meets the basic safety and survival needs of the family members
- adequately masters the environment and develops personal power
- develops and uses problem-solving skills
- quickly reconciles broken trust and resolves conflict
- realizes that mistakes happen and accepts imperfection
- allows members to live with the consequences of their irresponsible behavior
- believes in multiple causation of problems
- uses large repertoire of approaches to solve problems.

7. Relationship to Outside World

A healthy family is one which:

- has an open system, permeable and flexible boundaries
- has a positive, empathetic and altruistic view of those outside the family
- is involved in the community, both giving and receiving, in a balanced way

8. System of Values

A healthy family is one which:

- has an overall philosophy of life which guides the family
- which may include formal religious beliefs and practices and passes them on to the children
- or which may include a simple belief in a greater good that gives strength and meaning to life
- lives by and teaches a set of morals and values
- accepts death and other painful realities and finds hope and meaning in life.

9. Use of Time

A healthy family is one which:

- prioritizes its time and activities
- maintains a healthy balance of time between work and play
- spends large quantities of quality time together
- finds time for family members to do things together in pairs
- assures each individual member time and space alone.

10. System of Rules

A healthy family is one which:

- has a system of rules which is consistent with its overall philosophy of life
- has rules which are overtly stated and clearly understood by all members of the family
- has a system of rules which are kept current by means of periodic review
- has a means of enforcing the rules and following through with consequences which reflects fairness and caring.

B. Developmental Issues of Early Adolescents

Physical/Sexual Maturation

Mental/Cognitive/Psychological Changes

Identity

Autonomy

Normal rebellion

The World of the Peer Group.

C. Information on Stress

D. Specific Stepfamily Issues

- Structural Differences
    - Biological Parent Elsewhere
    - Complexities of Stepfamilies
    - Relationships in Stepfamilies
    - Lack of Definition of Stepfamily Roles
- Boundary Issues
    - Boundary Ambiguity
    - Permeability
    - Sexuality Issues
- Logistical problems
    - Two households
    - Mobility of children
    - Distribution of Resources
        - Turf
        - Time
        - Money
- Affective Issues
    - Myths
    - Stereotypes
    - Family Born of Many Losses
    - Stages of Grief
    - Divided Loyalties
    - Lowered Levels of Family Cohesion

- Parenting Issues
    - Parenting Styles
    - Parenting in Family of Origin
    - Parenting Coalitions in Stepfamilies
    - Custodial Vs. Non-custodial Parents
    - Strong Relationship with Both Parents
    - Strengthening Relationships with Stepparent
    - Discipline Vs. Separation in Stepfamilies
    - Manipulation
        - Parent/Child
        - Child/Parent

APPENDIX II. SUPPORTIVE/AFFECTIVE AREA

The following are suggested points to keep in mind when counseling with members of stepfamilies either individually or in groups.

A. Help individuals verbalize feelings and understand that they will change with "processing" and time

B. Validate the fact that all feelings are "okay"

C. Validate "normality" of:

   Range of feelings

   Intensity of feelings

   Variability of feelings

   Recycling of feelings

D. Explain that feelings tend to "cluster" into groups around a particular feeling; they then resolve or "stay stuck" and cause other problems.

      Sadness: Discouragement, Disappointment, Disillusionment, Depression, Grief.

      Fear: Tension, Anxiety, Nervousness, Terror, Panic, Paralysis.

      Anger: Irritation, Frustration, Resentment, Rage, Action.

      Confusion: Uncertainty, Question, Ambivalence, Stuckness, Search, Indecision, Decision.

      Guilt: Feel Silly, Chagrined, Embarrassed, Shame, Despair.

F. Lowered feelings of cohesion and attachment in stepfamilies are normal.

G. Feelings of "failure" or "success" around issues of divorce and remarriage are normal.

H. Encourage expression of feelings.

I. Help individuals separate feelings from behaviors.

J. Encourage exploration of positive alternatives, ways to deal with feelings other than through negative behavior.

K. Focus also on "good" feelings, areas of positive change, hope for future, achievements, and strengths.

L. Validate, affirm, preciousness of all individuals in stepfamily.

APPENDIX III. GUIDANCE/BEHAVIORAL AREA

"STEP UP TO SUCCESS:TOOLS FOR PROGRESS"

"Step Up To Success: Tools for Progress" is a title for all the experiential activities which can be used to help stepfamilies achieve better integration and success. Most of the following material is "common knowledge" to counselors and used in many other programs. These are suggestions, listed to spark creativity and encourage counselors to work with stepfamilies.

- Introduction of Topics
    - "Mini" Lectures on Relevant Topic From Appendix I
        - Small Group Discussions of Topic
        - Whole/Large Group Discussions of Topic
    - Vignettes/Scenarios on Stepfamily Life or Adolescent Behavior from:
        - Guidance Books, Workbooks, Videos
        - Popular Books, Movies, Cartoons, TV.
- Communication Skills
    - Doing Active listening
    - Reflecting back
    - Leveling techniques
    - "I" statements instead of "You" statements
        - When You.....
        - I Feel.....
        - Because.....
    - Uses of Can't/Won't/Don't
    - Uses of But/And

What I want/would like from you.....

What I am willing to do for you.....

Praising Versus Affirming

Use of visuals to stimulate insights, feelings, sharing:

Draw a Family

Family Tree(s)/Forest(s)

Genograms

Collages

Written Exercises

The following are suggestions for "written assignments" to be done by group members at home between sessions, or they could be used in group sessions for a group focus.

What I wish I had said/not said to...

The most unfair thing about stepfamily living is...

The most irritating thing about stepfamily living is...

If I could change one thing, I would change...

The best thing about my stepfamily is...

My part in the problem is...

What I can do to make it better is...

What I can do differently is...

My greatest fear is...

My greatest regret is...

My hope and my dream is that...

How can I make things better?

The following exercises are best done by stepfamily members at home between group sessions:

Write a letter to a member of your stepfamily telling that person something you find it difficult to say in person.

Write a history of your family, going back as far as you can. Write about such things as ethnic origin, the family name, family "jokes" and family pride. Tell about the education, achievements, kinds of work done by your family members.

During the duration of your time in group, keep a family diary. Tell about the kinds of things that are going on in your family right now, how you feel about these things, and how they affect you.

The following are suggestions for sharing in groups:

Any of the above activities, feelings or topics
Memories of Adults' Adolescence
Memories of Adults' relationships
    with parents during adolescence

The following are suggestions for brainstorming in groups:

Active ways to improve specific stepfamily
    relationships
        Couple
        Parent/Child
        Stepparent/Stepchild
        Stepsiblings
Active ways to improve parenting

The following are suggestions for more activities and skills to learn and practice in group sessions and at home:

Conflict Resolution Strategies
Problem-Solving Strategies
Family Meetings
Role-playing

In addition to school-based support groups, both students and adult members of stepfamily should be encouraged to seek out other support systems already in place in the community. Examples of other support systems include:

Networking with neighborhood parents
Extended family
Friends
12-Step or Other Kinds of Support Groups
Church/Synagogue groups
Social Organizations
Community Schools
Recreation Centers

APPENDIX IV. FURTHER READING

Feelings

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Kirsta, A. The Book of Stress Survival. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986.

Youngs, B. Helping Your Teenager Deal With Stress. Los Angeles: Tarcher/St. Martin's, 1986.

* These books contain extensive lists of "recommended reading" which is excellent for stepfamily members.

Further Information

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